

The #1 Computer Game Magazine

Computer Gaming World

THE NEW
LOOK OF
**COMPUTER
GAMING WORLD**
The #1 Computer Game Magazine

Shining Knight

Gabriel Knight 2

Takes Gamers On The
Hariest Adventure Ever!

ULTIMATE
GAME MACHINE

HOT REVIEWS

STONEKEEP
SU-27 FLANKER
YOU DON'T KNOW JACK

The Hottest Games On Wheels



INDYCAR II



THE NEED FOR SPEED



SCREAMER

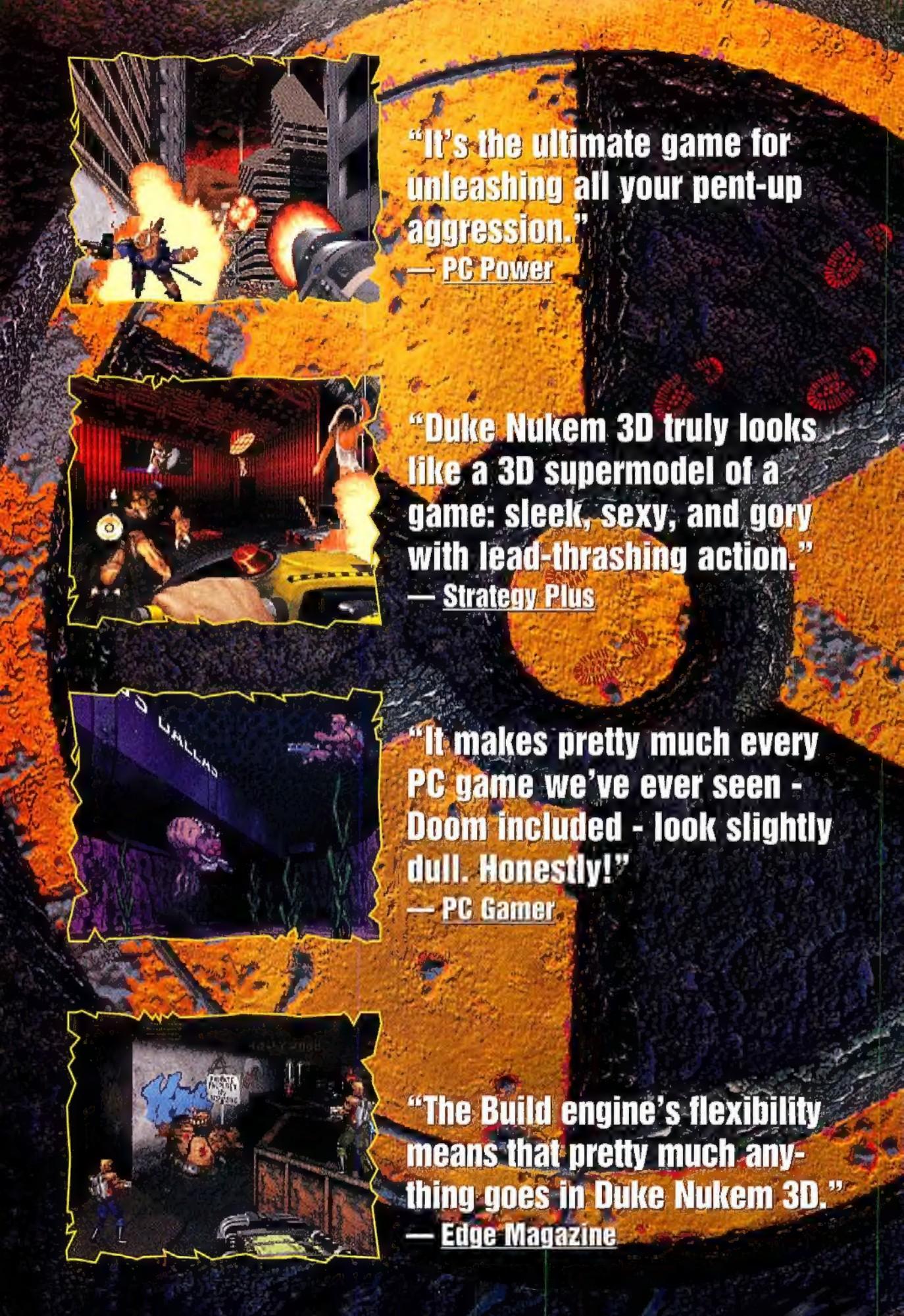
ZD
FEBRUARY 1996
NO. 139



FEBRUARY 1996
NO. 139



Prepare Yourself for Total Meltdown!



"It's the ultimate game for unleashing all your pent-up aggression."

— PC Power

"Duke Nukem 3D truly looks like a 3D supermodel of a game: sleek, sexy, and gory with lead-thrashing action."

— Strategy Plus

"It makes pretty much every PC game we've ever seen - Doom included - look slightly dull. Honestly!"

— PC Gamer

"The Build engine's flexibility means that pretty much anything goes in Duke Nukem 3D."

— Edge Magazine

PREPARE YOURSELF FOR THE ULTIMATE 3D SLUGFEST

Ass-stompin' aliens have landed, and the humans suddenly find themselves atop the endangered species list. The odds are a million-to-one, but Duke Nukem knows what's got to be done — KICK ALIEN BUTT!

- FANTASTIC 3D REALMS, with stunning, realistic graphics, await you as you thrash aliens through the streets of L.A., out to an orbiting space station, and onto the surface of the moon itself!
- INNOVATIVE BUILD 3D™ ENGINE TECHNOLOGY lets you explore an interactive, fully virtual world of towering skyscrapers, deep canyons, and murky bodies of water — complete with sloping surfaces, realistic earthquakes, functional subways, and many never-before-seen special effects.
- ARMED TO THE TEETH, you brandish your fully automatic sidearm, rocket launcher, pipebombs, and an assortment of awesome hi-tech weaponry that'll make your bones rattle and send the alien bastards to a bloody grave.
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- DYNAMIC COMM-BAT™ SYSTEM lets you duke it out one-on-one via modem, and enables up to 8-player battlefests over your network. Also, send prerecorded taunts to your human opponents via Duke's unique REMOTE RIDICULE SYSTEM™.
- TOTAL IMMERSIVE ENTERTAINMENT is guaranteed by state-of-the-art 3D graphics (including optional SVGA hi-res modes) and hot 3D sound FX and stereo music.

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Check out the Dark Forces demo on the LucasArts website at <http://www.lucasarts.com>.

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THE WAY
IN

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Full-motion video games
as you know them
are now as dead as this guy.



Yeah, we know full-motion video games



in the past sucked.

But we



solved that mystery. Now it's up to you to solve this one.

Capture a vicious killer by jumping from one suspect's mind to



the next. The story unfolds through their point of view. Seamless, real-time video

requires you to make life-saving



decisions instantly. So if you sit



around and don't interact, someone's going to turn up dead. Which is

bad, since you're supposed to be collecting clues, not corpses.



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CD



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Circle Reader Service #89

Computer Gaming

World

ZD

FEATURES

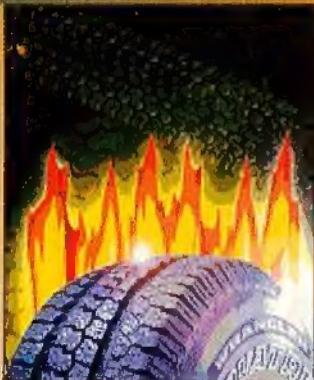
50 Cover Story: Gabriel Knight 2

Sierra's sequel to its popular GABRIEL KNIGHT adventure game mixes Wagner, werewolves and Ludwig into a tense tale of suspense and the supernatural. Jane Jensen has created a detective story with a brilliant twist and an exotic atmosphere. The story about modern-day lycanthropy in Germany is a technological and artistic achievement beyond our original sneak preview expectations. Johnny Wilson guides you through Sierra's five-star achievement.



58 Burning Rubber

Take a spin through the latest racers, from serious sims to arcade drivers to armed-and-dangerous drive-by shooters. A survey of 16 hot vehicles for digital gearheads.



74 IndyCar II

Papyrus has supercharged its NASCAR RACING engine and rolled out the world's leading racing simulation. Gordon Goble explains why INDYCAR II laps the competition.



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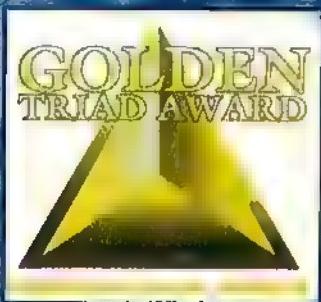


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ANVIL OF DAWN™



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Best Fantasy Role Playing
Game Of The Season.



Hmm... what shall it be? Ah, I think the Madison Raye is just the right choice. We'll move on down.



I'm not sure if I'm heading to the Scar Lab or something beyond that in the valley.



What a great old house! I wonder if it still works.



What kind of name is "Thomyrth"? I hope this dude doesn't cast some ugly spell my way.



Finally! The entrance to the fabled Land of Roots.



Right on! I could get cool weapons, armor, artifacts, spells, or even a huge key to unlock doors out of this deal. Ouch, it's the "Potion of Healing." That could come in handy down the road.

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More to hold your children, children.
Hold them close. For here you step
and... you go.

What the devil is he talking about?
I thought these were all talking
enchanted items supposed to give clues,
not riddle me to death.



It's the last scroll of the scroll of scrolls
that I have to find.



This pid... is the Land of Roots caretaker. Tried to frighten me off my quest by warning me about all the things that will happen to me in the dungeon. Not a chance, pops.



I didn't even wonder about this. Wait a second, who the hell was telling the truth? The whole op... thing.

Next move...

FEATURES

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A giant with a cane
lived under a hill.

He would always say,

"For what? Nowhere around."

So they expected me to go.

But I had a mind of my own.

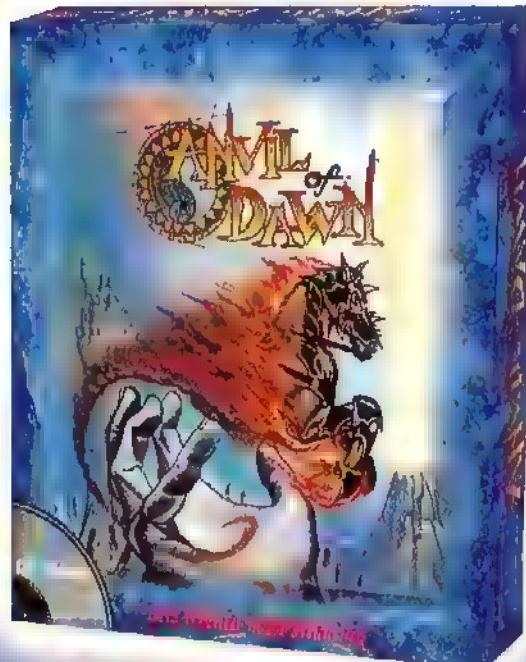
So I went where I wanted to go.

And I never looked back.

Now I'm the legend.

And I'll be the legend tomorrow.

So I'll be the legend tomorrow.



**Editor-in-Chief**

Johnny Wilson has been a fixture in the computer gaming industry longer than most PC gaming magazines have been in print. The grand (grandiose?) old man of Computer Gaming World has written for the magazine since 1982, joined the editorial staff in 1986 and authored more than 300 reviews during his reign of terror. He has also

written the *SimCity Planning Commission Handbook* and the *SimEarth Bible*, as well as co-authored *Sid Meier's Civilization or Rome on 640K a Day* (with Alan Emrich) and *The SimCity 2000 Planning Commission Handbook* (with Peter Spear). Although Johnny has a Ph.D. in Old Testament Studies, he has been named to Who's Who in the West, and won the SPA's Best Software Reviewer award in 1991. He is much stiffer than that.



Alan Emrich has been active in gaming since discovering *Strategy & Tactics* magazine in the 70s. He co-founded L.A.'s Strategicon game conventions, which is still going strong 20 years later, and he often travels to gaming conventions to serve as game auctioneer CG's Contributing Wargames Editor and strategy/wargames columnist is a past Vice-President of GAMA (the Games Manufacturers

Association), former publisher of *Fire & Movement*, *Battleplan* and *Space Gamer* magazines, and a regular contributor to *Computer Gaming* and *GameFix* magazines. Alan has co-authored several computer game strategy guides (for *Civilization*, *Master of Orion*, *Master of Magic*, *Empire Deluxe*, and others) and helped design and produce boardgames, including *Modern Naval Battles*, *A House Divided* 2nd Edition, and the upcoming *Krieg!*



Scorpia has long been the leading authority for adventure and computer role-playing reviews. CG's Adventure Games Contributing Editor has been an avid gamer since purchasing her first computer, an Apple II+, back in 1981. In 1982, she co-founded the original GameSIG on CompuServe, where publisher Russell Sipe asked her to write for

this magazine (which, up to that time, she'd never heard of). Thus began the Scorpions' Tale in 1983, and the rest, as they say, is history. She is arguably the most experienced, most outspoken critic of unimaginative or sloppy adventure game design, and though game publishers often fear her reviews, her loyal audience wouldn't have her any other way. Aside from her monthly columns here, Scorpia can also be found online on GENie, Delphi, and AOL.



Loyd Case is the modern equivalent of the guy who spent endless hours in his garage tinkering with his '49 Plymouth. After receiving an advanced degree in Physical Chemistry, he ended up in the computer biz and never looked back. He

first started game playing with Avalon Hill's classic boardgame Blitzkrieg, and is still an avid strategy gamer today. The IBM version of Zork was his first computer game, in addition to being CG's Contributing Technology Editor, Case is a regular guy with a wife, kids and a job, but he harbors a secret desire to write potboiler novels.



Charles Ardai, CG's Contributing Editor for Interactive Fiction, has written about gaming for more than 15 years. Biting, incisive and often controversial, his published criticism on the subject of computer games amounts to more

than a quarter of a million words, the bulk of them in our pages. Charles is a member of the Horror Writers Association, and has had short stories published in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine and other publications. When he's not playing games, Ardai is President of Juno, a free Internet e-mail service (<http://www.juno.com>).

Computer Gaming

CG 139

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"HOT GAME!"

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**"THE GRAPHICS ARE
FANS WILL BE IN JOY"**

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These are answers to some of the most-frequently asked questions from our readers. We offer this as a service to

our readers so that you won't keep sending us nasty e-mails asking how to get the CD-ROM. But we won't hold our breath.

What's On The CD-ROM?

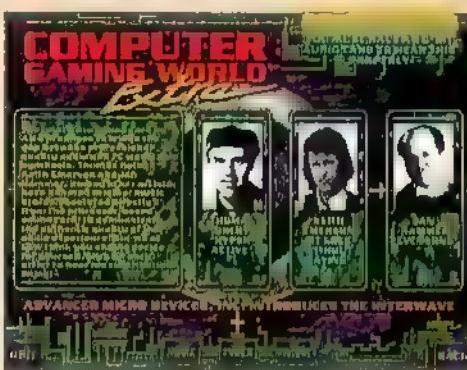
Once again, our CD comes to you loaded with goodies like game demos, patches, features and scenarios. This month, we are proud to introduce our Reality One Comic, designed by Ted Riddle exclusively for CG readers (Ziff-Davis Publishing's first comic in 40 years!). The CD is Windows 3.1 and Windows 95 compatible.

Also this month we have a special feature for STEEL PANTHERS fans (number one on the Top 100 and Playing Lately list). Click on the STEEL PANTHERS page to view a demo, or access a scenario and a game patch.

Remember, you'll need a commercial copy of SP in order to use the patch and scenario. Download and

We're also featuring something slightly different this time out: audio. You'll be able to enjoy digital audio samples mastered directly from the InterWave processor-based sound card from AMD. Check out original music scores from Thomas Dolby, Keith Emerson (of Lake and Palmer fame) and Jan

clicking just as you would in any other Windows program. To see and hear words of wisdom from our Editor-in-Chief, click on WELCOME, then LETTER FROM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF. Click on Johnny himself, and he'll greet you in one of his many master-of-dialect personae.



conquer the scenario—developed exclusively for CG by our strategy writer, Patrick Miller—send us your solution, and you stand a chance to win one of three free subscriptions to CG Magazine (To copy the STEEL PANTHERS scenarios, simply click on it in the CGW Extra main screen and follow the instructions.)

Hammer. One note, you'll need a 16-bit sound card to hear the truly authentic quality.

This month you'll also find demos of SU-27 FLANKER by SSI, DESTRUCTION DERBY from Sony Psynosis, and a peek of SHANNARA by Legend Entertainment, as well as a plethora of product demos from some of our advertisers.

How Do I Use It?

Our CD is a Windows program, but have no fear. If you have Windows 95, installation is a breeze—our CD is Autoplay enabled. Just "Lock 'n load." Otherwise, boot your computer in Windows 3.1, pop the CD into your drive, select RUN from the Program Manager's menu and type D:\RUN-ME (where D is the letter of your CD ROM drive) to run it straight from the CD or D:\INSTALL to create a Computer Gaming World program group on your Windows desktop. Then, navigate by pointing and

How Do I Get The Demo Files?

To access these demos, click on EDITORS HOT DEMO PICKS, then click on the title you want to see, and follow the instructions. To get demos provided by the publishers, click on PRODUCT DEMOS and go to either Action (Expect No Mercy, MISSION CRITICAL, TEMPEST 2000 and WIPEOUT), or Adventure and Simulation (FIGHTER DEL and MISSION CRITICAL).

How Do I Get The Patch Files?

Click on PATCHES under the CGW FEATURES, then read the text window with instructions on copying the files to your hard drive. Follow the instructions for any files on the CD.

How Do I Get The CD-ROM?

Newsstand issues come in two flavors, those with the CD and those without. Each type is clearly marked. If you can't find the version you want in the store, encourage your retailer to carry it (or subscribe to assure yourself of getting your copy every month). To subscribe, simply call 800-827-4450 (or 303 665-8930), and specify that you want the CD-ROM version.

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How Do We Classify Games?

Action/Arcade (AC): The emphasis is on hand-eye coordination and reflexes, usually emphasizing fast play over story or strategy.

Adventure (AD): Games wherein you control an alter ego and move through a storyline or sequence of events, where puzzle-solving takes precedence over conversation and combat.

Classics/Puzzles (CP): Classics are old stand-bys and parlor games that appeal to many different types of gamers. Examples are: BACKGAMMON, Bridge, chess, MONOPOLY, PARCHESI, RISK, and SOLITAIRE. Puzzle games are computer games which emphasize spatial relationships, word games and/or problem-solving without requiring gamers to follow a storyline. Examples would be: Shanghai, TETRIS and ZIG-ZAG.

Role-Playing (RP): RPGs are a subset of adventure games, but stress character development, often through improving stats or other attributes. Conversations with non-player characters (NPCs) and incli-

cal combat are generally more important than in Adventure games. Finally, the game world tends to be large, and the plot less linear, often with some quest/treks removed from the main storyline.

Simulations (SI): Highly realistic games from a first-person perspective: you may drive a realistically simulated race car, fly a military aircraft with a meticulous physics model, or swoop through a detailed sci-fi environment. Usually polygon-filled technology is used to build the simulated world on the fly.

Sports (SP): The sports game category is a broad genre which includes action (NBA Live) and strategy games (Front Page Football Pro) based on sports.

Strategy (ST): Problem-solving, short- and long range planning are the keys here. These games almost always emphasize resource and risk management. This genre includes conflict-based sci-fi and fantasy games (X-COM, OUTPOST, MOO), as well as "pure" strategy games and "software toys" such as SIMCITY.

Wargames (WG): A subset of strategy games, these recreate his-

torical conflicts from a command perspective. They may be tactical, operational, or strategic, and stress anything from logistics and firepower to morale and leadership. They may be simple (PANZER GENERAL, EMPIRE II) to incredibly detailed and complex (PACIFIC WAR).

What Is Your Reviews Policy?

1) We only review from the final copy of the game. Though it has become popular among PC gaming magazines to review from late beta copies, we feel that the reader is best served by having the reviewer look at the same copy of a game that the readers will find on the shelves. While we recognize that this causes some delay in coverage, we believe the reader is better served by such caution.

2) We expect our reviewers to finish the game. We want our readers to be assured that we do not review based on immediate or early impressions of a game. Our reviewers give a game ample opportunity to show its quality. In some cases, bugs make it impossible to finish a game, but we identify situations where that has occurred.

3) We make every effort to match the reviewer to the game. We take into consideration the preferences, background and possible biases of the reviewer and, where possible, we find people with actual life experience or special backgrounds which match a game. We believe this policy enhances both the credibility of the review and the enjoyment of gameplay when the real world and the game world are competently compared.

4) We do not accept free travel from software or hardware companies. We believe such gifts have a tacit assumption of coverage attached to them. We will only cover such events/launches as we believe will benefit our readers.

HOW DO WE RATE?

We only review finished product, not pre-release versions. The ratings are as follows:



Outstanding: The rare game that gets it all right. The graphics, sound, and gameplay come together to form a transcendent gaming experience. Our strongest buying recommendation.



Very Good: A high-quality game that succeeds in many areas. May have minor problems but is still worth your time and money, especially if you're interested in the subject matter or genre.



Average: A mixed bag. Can be a game that reaches for the stars but falls short in significant areas. Can also be a game that does what it does well, but lacks flair or originality.



Weak: A game with serious problems. Usually buggy, seriously lacking in play value, or just a poorly conceived game design—and you will want to think long and hard before buying it.



Abysmal: The rare game that gets it all wrong. This is reserved for those products so buggy, incomplete or valueless that you wonder why they were ever released.

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- Also starring: Jimmie Walker, Ethan Wayne, David Patrick Kelly, and Ossie Davis

RIPPER



Starring
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Burgess Meredith
John Rhys-Davies

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Show And Tell

Today's Gamers Need More Than Pretty Pictures From Games And Magazines

Remember the "Show and Tell" experience in elementary school? I really hated it—it was boring to watch other kids show toys, pictures and souvenirs that I couldn't handle or use. "What's the use?" I'd say. "I'll never get one of those." Immature? You bet! Short-sighted? Of course! Yet, my childish reaction to elementary school's "Show and Tell" underscores an important truth about human nature: we only want to pay attention to what we believe is going to affect us. We don't just want to be talked to; we want to do something.

You've read my complaints in this column about what I call multi-mediocre products. They're multi-mediocre because the sole level of interactivity often seems to be pointing and clicking between pictures, text blocks, video clips and music/voiceovers. You don't feel like you've accomplished anything and there doesn't seem to be an immediate way to put what you've found to use. It's just "Show and Tell."

Even some computer games have such a low interactive component that you might as well be watching a movie for all the mental stimulation you gain or feeling of accomplishment you achieve. They might as well be "Show and Tell."

Right now, people like Larry Ellison of Oracle Corporation are dreaming of a \$500 Internet box. They seem to have overlooked the past. Philips' CD-i, Commodore's

CDTV, Tandy's VIS and even Trip Hawkins' 3DO Multiplayer were all supposed to be powerful processing machines at a consumer price point, designed to provide positive computing experiences for the masses. Yet, they all missed the point about computing. Computing is about letting the user/gamer/player make what he or she wants. Word processing? Playing with words until you get something you want. Spreadsheets? Playing with numbers until you get the results you want. Databases? Playing with data until you find the cut you want. Games? Playing with problems and situations until you can get the result you want—VICTORY!

What good will an Internet box do if you can't print out the recipes you find, store the sound files you download, or play with the data you find? Not much! It's "Show and Tell!" You give the public a choice of things to look at, but it's still mostly looking—not using.

The same thing can be true of magazines. We know you don't read our magazine just to read what we think about a game. You want the rumors, news, facts and informed judgment in a package that helps you find out if a given game is for you. We also know you don't read our magazine just to lust after pictures and text about the latest computing equipment for gamers. You want to find the right equipment solution for your individual needs. We know you want help in winning games, getting extra value from the games you have, and overcoming bugs in games. Anything less is just "Show and Tell!"



To this end, we've redesigned Computer Gaming World to help you get what you need even faster. Here's what's new. First, we've redesigned our logo to key on

“We've redesigned Computer Gaming World to help you find what you need even faster.”

what's most important—Computer Gaming. We originally called ourselves Computer Gaming World because we believed it conveyed the fact that we try to cover the entire spectrum of computer games—design, production, evaluation and participation. This had two disadvantages. First, we sometimes found ourselves writing more to the

software publishers than to computer gamers. Second, you sometimes had trouble finding what you were buying the magazine to get—results. Results like purchase recommendations, strategy tips, news and rumors, and, of course, ways to get extra value from games you've already purchased.

The old logo looked like our old philosophy. Under the World emphasis, we tried to be so comprehensive that you often had to wade through long blocks of text to find the hint, tip or rumor you needed. Our old logo was a big block of text. Under the World emphasis, the pages have often looked rather flat and lifeless because all of the action was in the text. Our new logo looks active and bold. It speaks of action. That's why, whenever you see references or graphics which focus on Computer Gaming or CG rather than the more familiar Computer Gaming World, you'll know it's part of our concerted effort to provide action—results.

So, when you see CG-ROM, you'll know we've provided something you can do on our CD. We're offering files to test games, fix

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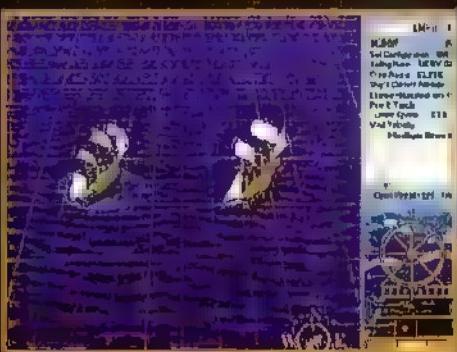
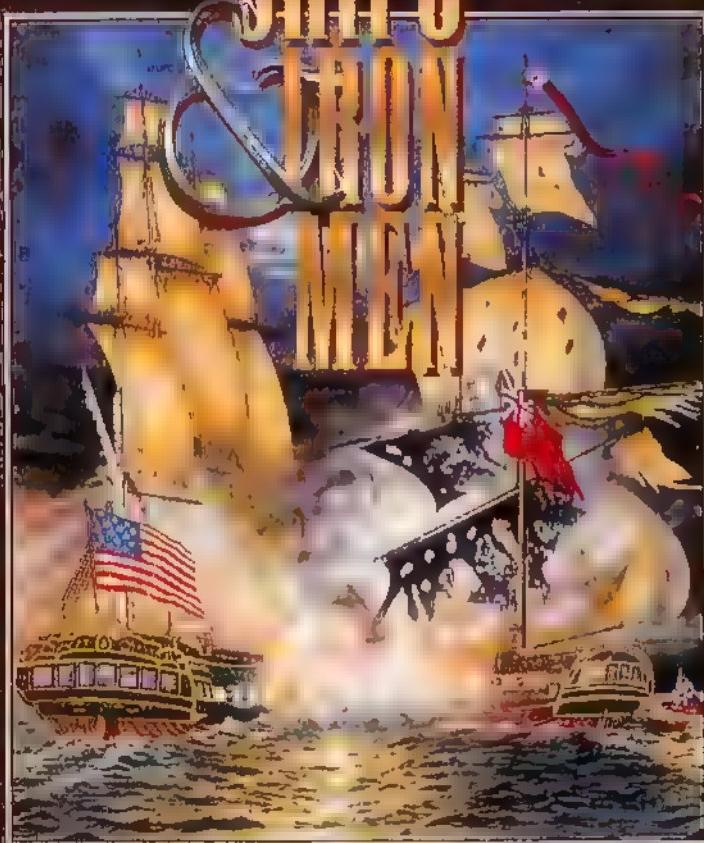
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STANLEY
ASSOCIATES

games, extend games, master games and customize games. There are demos to play, but there is much, much more. We're also

pleased that subscribers can now order the magazine with the CO-ROM instead of having to find a newsstand copy or borrow it from a friend.

When you see CG-ONLINE, you'll know that we're either providing something active on one of our electronic editions or have found something very cool on someone else's. CG-ONLINE lets you that you can download something you can use, find additional information, or interact with us on-line.

As part of the results-oriented theme of the new look, we've added several new elements to the reviews. You'll find a difficulty scale that tells you at a glance how difficult it is to learn and play that game. The familiar 5-star ratings system and Pros/Cons hasn't changed, but we've added an "Appeal" line to the ratings box to suggest what kinds of gamers might like a given product. If a game is so good that it deserves a 4.5 or 5-star rating, you'll see a CG CHOICE graphic, which tells you it's one of the best games we've played all year, either technologically, creatively, competitively or all three.

Many readers have commented in the past 18 months that they like the color-coded "home section" for different game genres. So we've expanded the format to include new home sections: Classics/Puzzles (so that Bridge, Poker, Monopoly, Tetris and Shanghai players don't have to look through the Strategy/Wargaming section to find their types of games) and Technology (to keep you abreast of new hardware and rapidly emerging technology).



We've also added CG TIPS to the columns which open each home section. This is in response to your continuing requests for more strategy tips. The CG TIPS are technology or gameplay tips that tell you how to beat games in that genre.

You want earlier looks at games? We've turned the Pipeline into a Game Track which includes: Sightings (early screenshots and information on upcoming games), Pipeline (the publishers' release schedules), and Hands On (our first experiences with preliminary, working code).

Another change you may notice this month is that we've reclassified science fiction-style simulations. In the past, we felt that games which do not attempt to model real-world vehicles couldn't be labeled "Simulation." However, some of these games have become so detailed and realistic that it became impossible to consider them just "Action" games. As a result, you will now find realistic first person simulation games like MechWarrior 2, Wing Commander 3 and Tie Fighter reviewed in the Simulations section rather than the Action section. Of course, the reclassification of this genre is carried through into the Top 100 games index, where you will find both kinds of simulation combined. The reclassification fits better with what the wider gaming market considers to be a sim as opposed to an unrealistic, fast-paced action game.

Most of all, we're excited that we can present this useful new look without losing one word of text from the traditional CGW layout. We tested it with old articles in the new layouts and came to one conclusion: our graphic artists are geniuses.

Here's to all who helped in the new design—artists, editors and contributors. And here's to our readers, we trust we're giving you more to "Do and Use" instead of just "Show and Tell." Salud! ☺

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LETTER OF THE MONTH

I'm amazed each month by the increasing size of every new CGW that graces my mailbox. This phenomenon is not due to increased advertising; there are more reviews and features in every issue! Hats off to CGW!

Imagine, though, the shock I felt at seeing the December issue on the newsstand with a WING:

COMMANDER IV CD-ROM demo which my mailed copy was lacking! How can I get hold of that CD? A CD short of buying another issue of the greatest magazine in the world? Also, who thinks up the catchy art clichés? It's always a laugh.

Andrew Vane
Green Village, NJ

The staff's pride in being able to produce a December issue 100 pages larger than the closest competitor was tempered by the knowledge that subscribers wouldn't be able to get the demo disk. There is a chance you may be able to obtain one by calling our subscription number, (303) 665-8930.

Going forward, subscribers now have the option to receive the CG-ROM with your magazine, at a slight additional cost. If you would like to get the disc, call the number above.

*As for those catchy titles, we have to say it's either *The Rumor City*, *Headline Elves* or the night janitor making changes after hours. We don't want those truly responsible to take the blame for their sometimes egregious punniness.*

SINS OF SHANNARA

Lori and I were very pleased to see our new Legend Entertainment game, **SHANNARA**, listed as #5 of the "Top 10 adventure games in the 'Holiday Hot 100'" section of CGW #137. Unfortunately, the writer has one major factual error which I hope you can correct in an upcoming issue: **SHANNARA** is a completely orig-



Lori & Corey Cole

inal story by Corey and Lori Cole, not by Terry Brooks. We met with Mr.

Brooks to discuss the game concept and his idea of how a computer game based on his novels should look, and we continued to provide updates to Mr. Brooks and his Random House editor, Owen Locke, during the course of development. Other than that, the work is completely ours.

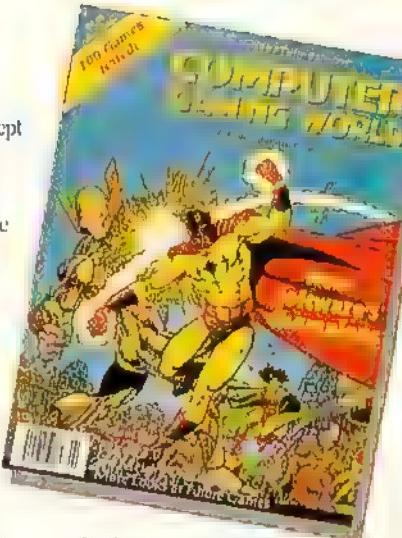
Lori and I read and enjoy CGW each month, and we really appreciate the efforts our authors and editors make to lift game developers from obscurity. We sometimes wonder if the continual 80-hour weeks and stress of trying to make Christmas deadlines are worth it, and seeing our names in CGW's reviews and previews helps us remember why we are in this business—because we care about our games and giving players the best we can make.

Corey Cole
Oakhurst, CA

Sorry about the confusion. We interviewed Terry Brooks, creator of the Shannara novels, in the prior month, which made some editors assume that he authored the game. So they referred to a Terry Brooks design in the Hot 100 article. We had actually interviewed Brooks to get background on the creation of the SHANNARA novels, and Brooks had observed that he would control the content of the novels and let others (i.e. Legend and the Coles) control the creation of the games. So SHANNARA is a game based on the Terry Brooks universe, but the game was written and designed by Corey and Lori Cole of Quest for Glory fame.

CHAMPION CHARLIE BROWN

This may seem a little old, but I can't seem to get any answers anywhere else. Way, way, way back in June of '92, you did an article on CHAMPIONS. I was curious about



what happened to it. I heard it got out to Beta testing, but I never heard about any builds or anything about it. Hem Software has been non-responsive to my letters, so I was hoping you could answer my questions:

1) What happened to the CHAMPIONS CRPG? Why didn't it ever come out when they were so close to finishing? Why did they resign themselves to just publishing [the] HERO MAKER [character generation software]?

2) Do you happen to have the Beta version or possibly one of the builds for CHAMPIONS? If so, could I have a copy? I am a big fan and I just need to see the game to try it out. I'm a bit of a programmer. I know Visual Basic and C++ and a friend of mine and I want to build our own game. That is not why I want the CHAMPIONS CRPG (Computer Role-Playing Game), though. I just want to know what I missed (or didn't miss, whatever the case may be).

3) What's up with INDESTRUCTIBLES, the hero game that is supposed to come out from Bullfrog? Is it going to be a role-playing type or just a Rock 'em/Sock 'em game?

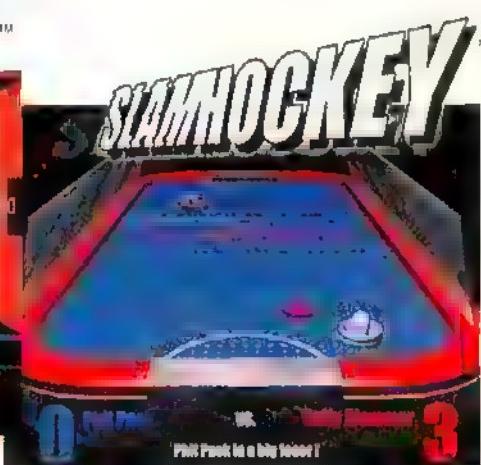
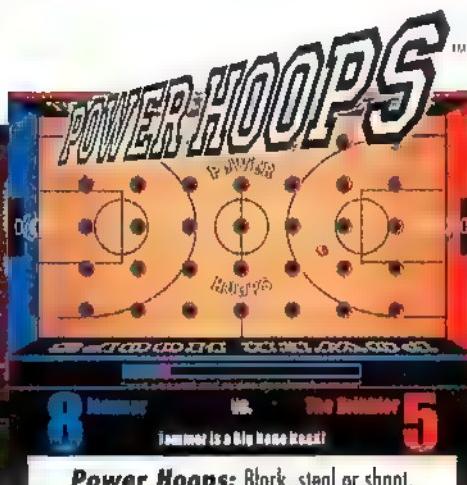
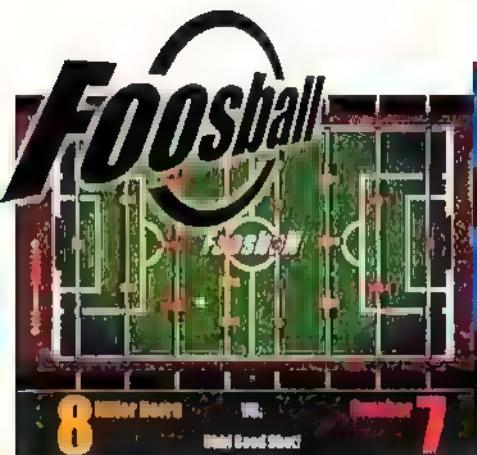
Mark G. Roberts
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Circle Reader Service #176

principals at Hero Software decided that the game was too outdated to finish and bring to market. This was a sad decision, since the entire company was formed from people who loved the "people and paper" role-playing game and had sunk their mortgages and royalty money from other projects into working for years without salary and trying to make this game happen. We have heard several reasons for this: 1) the paper game's exception-driven rules system led to programming nightmares; 2) the paper modules which the scriptwriter intended to plug into the game didn't flow as neatly as expected; 3) the principals were out of money and patience; and 4) the "dated" look related to the project taking so long caused several potential distributors to pass on picking up the product. Regardless of which reason or combination thereof might be most valid, no one is currently at work on the CRPG. That's why you can't get hold of anyone at Hero Software.

As for the beta, there never was one. Our '92 cover story was based upon one module that had been converted to the computer and we played through that in pieces. At that time, it looked like the game would come together very quickly. Unfortunately, it didn't. We no longer have even that one module, but we couldn't give it to you if we did. It would still belong to the principals of Hero Software. HEROMAKER was an attempt to get some revenue out of the character creation utility that had already been programmed for the game.

The INDESTRUCTIBLE looks like it will have both role-playing elements (with character creation both similar to and more advanced in some ways than the CHAMPIONS game had) and real-time action (in 3-D). We are very much looking forward to this mid-to-late '96 release.

STONEKEEP OR STONEDEEP?

Interplay must have been in a big rush to release their highly touted game, STONEKEEP, because it sure was not ready! Like the many hundreds of others I have encountered online, I have got nothing but headaches out of STONEKEEP. Originally my problems arose from a lack of usable memory due to Win 95. I eventually managed to fix this problem—no thanks to an hour wasted on the phone with Interplay's technical support, and numerous messages posted on AOL.

After I finally got the game up and running I encountered not the dragons, and goblins and other monsters that I expected, but rather I ran into bug after gruesome bug! Taking a look at the BBS that Interplay has for STONEKEEP on AOL, I saw that many others had experienced the same bugs I had in addition to a multitude of other problems that I was "fortunate" enough to have avoided. There also seem to be two definite opinions concerning Interplay's Tech Support: 1) They are non-existent; and 2) They have no idea what they are talking about. The bottom line is Interplay was not ready to release this game and as a result they have jilted many gaming fans out of their time and money. I have begun a campaign to boycott Interplay products until restitution is made.

Jack Cox
Denver, Colorado

Strange. We received this letter on the same day as our very positive review of STONEKEEP. You find yourself totally frustrated because of the bugs, but our reviewer loved the game in spite of the bugs. The good news is that there is a solid game there. The



bad news is that such technical flaws can turn off gamers such as yourself. We print your letter as a service to our readers who might be as frustrated as you. After the years this product spent in development, we don't think Interplay rushed it out the door. We simply recognize that a lot has happened and wish that the technical support was better. We also received many more positive than negative letters on the product. Here are some of them:

Loaded up STONEKEEP at 5 A.M. and the next thing I knew, it was lunchtime. Now, that's a game!

Joe S.
Allen Park, MI

STONEKEEP is the first RPG I've played in some time that actually makes my hair stand on end! Excellent game, well worth the wait!

Daniel C. McLaughlin
Brockport, NY

STONEKEEP has made a permanent residence on my CD-ROM drive...By then, I shall prevail!

Richard Crespo
Woodbridge, VA

TERMINAL VERACITY

Is it just me or are F1 R³ and TERMINAL VELOCITY the same game?

Jeffrey Frost
Glen Ellyn, IL

They are basically the same game, except that F1 R³ does not allow connective play. Microsoft has histor-

ically picked up interesting games in the DOS or Macintosh markets like LINKS 386 PRO and TONY LARUSA 2 and ported them to the Windows environment as MICROSOFT GOLF, MICROSOFT BASEBALL, etc.

110%

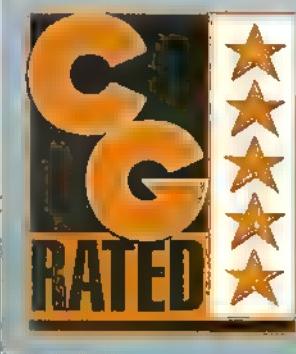
Why do you use stars for your reviews instead of percentages?

David Ture
Orlando, FL

The mag is great! But the stars for ratings kinda' bite! Stars and percentages would be nice.

C.S. Lukens
Evanston, IL

We use stars because they are part of an established ratings mechanism that has been used by film, television, literary and restaurant critics for decades. A quick look at our five star scale gives you a quick take of our editorial staff's valuation of the game. Frankly, since these are subjective ratings (see "How We Rate" in the FAQ section) as opposed to objective measurements, we're not sure our readers would gain any real value by trying to figure out whether an 85% or an 84% rating is better and why? Both would more than likely be de facto "Buy" recommendations. We don't use percentages because we think they imply an exactitude which is impossible to quantify in a subjective ratings system.





No amount of marketing hype could do this game justice. If you enjoy awesome arcade action then you owe it to yourself to download the shareware version of Tyrian and see it for yourself. Bring along a friend, because Tyrian features a two-player mode as well as network and modem support. We're sure you'll be hooked.

Here are just a few places you can find Tyrian:

Epic's web site: <http://www.epicgames.com>

Epic's official ftp site: <ftp://ftp.umj.edu> in
the msdos/games/epic directory

Exec-PC BBS (414) 789-4360

CompuServe: GO EPIC and
download Tyrian from the Epic Forum

AOL: keyword PCGAMES, in the software libraries
Epic's shareware games can also be found on many
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3-D Art Gets Faster And Cheaper

SoftImage's NT Tools Offer Affordable Performance

High-end computer animation just got a lot more affordable. One of the major software animation packages, SoftImage 3D, is now available for Windows NT. Until this launch, game developers and professional animators who used the powerful toolset were

required to use expensive Silicon Graphics

SoftImage 3D can be used to render cartoon characters like this little bugger.

machines. Now, with the release of the Windows NT conversion, complete with all the functions and commands available in the SGI version, it will be possible to perform the same tasks at a much reduced price point (\$15,000 for the Netpower R4400 RISC-based turnkey system bundled with SoftImage's basic \$7,995 software package). Plus, animation houses and software publishers will be able to set up "render farms" that cost less and work faster than current SGI models.

In December, SoftImage demonstrated an identical rendering being performed on an SGI Indigo 2 and a new Digital Equipment EV5 machine (running at 366 MHz) equipped with a RISC-based Alpha processor and Windows NT. The Digital

machine was more than two times faster than the SGI. Plus, the NT operating system allows accelerator cards to help complete rendering jobs even faster.

SoftImage 3D for Windows NT is a full-function 3-D animation tool that enables artists to develop complex models with subtle expressive movements. The software offers capabilities that few people outside the field can understand: function curves, animation timelines, fast preview rendering, adaptive ray tracing, mental ray tracing,

inverse kinematic chains, and lattice deformation (the tool

used to make the dancing gasoline pumps in a popular television commercial). It is these kinds of features that have been



SoftImage 3D for Windows NT may render SGI workstations unnecessary for game developers.

the NT software will allow companies to use: Intergraph Computer Systems'

entry level Pentium Pro systems which start at \$15,500, bundled with the NT program and can be beefed up to having four processors. The advantage of the quad-processor solution is that two can be rendering in the background while the animator is working in the foreground without a performance hit.

The bottom line: With less expensive 3-D tools and affordable 3-D graphics accelerator cards, our anticipation of a 3-D graphics revolution in 1996 seems more certain than ever. As they say in the animation biz, stay "loon"ed.

Here's a quick look at the hottest products on store shelves, as

NAVY STRIKE

NAVY STRIKE boasts an intriguing combination of strategy game and flight simulation. Neither can compete with stand-alone entries in their respective genres, but the combination is intriguing enough to warrant a look. The strategy module puts you in charge of a carrier tasked with defending America's interests in one of three theatres. You manage all air assets, including fighters,

well as the ones which may not survive though the winter chill.

patrols, allocating aircraft, weapons and waypoints as you see fit. You can jump into the action and fly F-18, F-22N or AX "Dorito" aircraft. Check it out if the strategy element appeals to you; if you just want to fly, you can find much better simulators.

Empire, (301) 916 9303; IBM CD-ROM Reader Service: # 301

AIR POWER

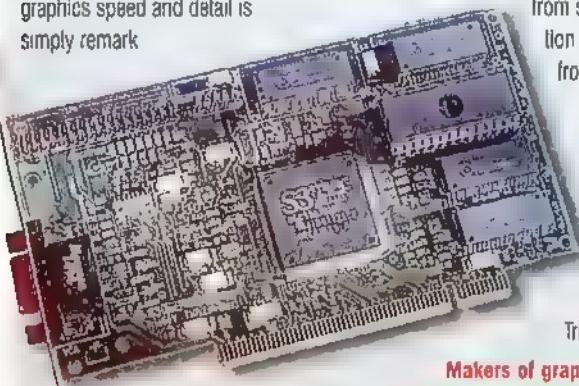
There are few things worse than a promising game that turns out to be un-playable. The concept behind Air Power is great: A parallel world where a great war was fought in the 1930s using airship-launched fighter

ON THE SHELF



On The ViRGE Of Something Good

There's no doubt about it. The top item on most rea. gamers' Christmas lists in 1996 is going to be a 3-D board. Once you've seen one of these in action, there's just no going back to processor-driven pseudo 3-D; the difference in graphics speed and detail is simply remark-



competitive feature set: accelerated 3-D rendering, bi linear filtering, MIP mapping (including tri-linear), transparency, and atmospheric fog. Z-buffering lets the chip—instead of your PC's processor—handle the removal of surfaces that should be hidden from sight, and perspective correction keeps objects and textures from warping.

But perhaps the biggest ace in S3's hand is ViRGE's pin-compatibility with the company's popular Trio64V+ 2-D accelerator chip. Companies don't need to redesign their existing Trio64V+ based graphics

Makers of graphic accelerator cards may

have the urge to use the ViRGE chip, since it's compatible with their existing boards.

able. Chip and board manufacturers realize they have something hot on their hands, and they're scrambling to get cool products out in an effort to get their share of your dollars.

The latest contestant in the upcoming Battle of the 3-D Chips is the ViRGE chip, from S3. Using what the company calls its S3d architecture, the ViRGE (Video and Rendering Game Engine) chip sports a very

boards to use the chip—just update the board's BIOS ROM and include the ViRGE instead. The ViRGE can also be used on motherboard-based graphics subsystems.

Look for the ViRGE to hit the market around late February on boards in the \$200 to \$350 range; a high-end ViRGE/VX will follow, offering even greater 3-D acceleration.

planes. Take a little strategy and diplomacy and add some unique flight simulation action, and you have a real winner, right? Wrong. After hours of trying, we couldn't get SVGA support to work on any of three PCs. Once we did get the game running in VGA, we discovered planes that handled like pigs on a Pentium, and possibly the worst cockpit view in flight sim history—the instrument panel obscures three-fourths of the screen. Great idea, very creative graphics, but a terrible implementation.

Mindscape, (415) 897-9900, IBM CD-ROM

Reader Service: #302

TANG CHI

TANG Chi, a delightful puzzle game from Capcom, consists of seven geometric shapes that arrange into an incredible assortment of shapes, from an apple to a shark—not to overlook the origi-



nal square from which the pieces are cut (and included in the package). Racing against the clock, you assemble the pieces on a palette. Upon successful completion of each puzzle (50 in all), you are rewarded with an animation originating from the shape you've just built. The game is challenging and forces you to view the simplistic, familiar shapes and their interrelation in a new perspective. You're given a total of 10 hints—but don't use them too soon. The variety of shapes, ergo, the number of puzzles (50) is astonishing. The game is very addicting and surprisingly soothing, considering the ever-present timer. The only noticeable flaw was that it couldn't be a permanent fixture

CGW's 1994 Readersurvey showed that only 2 percent of PC gamers owned Pentium machines. That number passed 28 percent by mid-1995.

PLAYING LATELY?

Here are the games that your fellow players are blowing the most time with. Let us know which game you've been playing the most by writing the name of your current addition in the "Playing Lately?" blank of the CGW Top 100 ballot.



1. Steel Panthers (SSI)
2. Command & Conquer (Virgin/Westwood Studios)
3. Crusader: No Remorse (Origin)
4. Mechwarrior 2 (Activision)
5. Stonekeep (Interplay)
6. Heroes of Might and Magic (New World Computing)
7. Hexen: Beyond Heretic (Raven)
8. Wing Commander III (Origin)
9. Panzer General (SSI)
10. Caesar II (Sierra)

on the desktop for a quick diversion during work. *Capcom (408) 774-0400; Mac or PC CD-ROM*

Reader Service: #303

WARCRAFT II

WARCRAFT II—one of the most eagerly anticipated sequels of the year—is finally here. The original WARCRAFT, with its fantasy setting and DUNE II-like engine, was an instant hit. It improved upon DUNE II with the advent of rescue missions, surgical strike missions and memorable troops, all of which made WARCRAFT a great strategy game. WARCRAFT II, if you can believe it, is even better.



Joining the humans and orcs now are ogres, trolls, dwarves, and elves. And the battle has moved to the air and sea, with dragon and gryphon aerial troops, massive ocean-going Elven destroyers, and Ogre jug-

3D BI

The Ultimate 3D C

We've Included these
Five Next Generation
3D games designed
specifically for 3D Blaster.



Rebel Moon

Defend your ship against attacks from enemy forces. *Rebel Moon* from Sierra's Wolf delivers stunning 3D game play with 3D effects that come at you from all directions. Exclusively on 3D Blaster.

Magic Carpet™ Plus
Fight to restore realms that have been annihilated by catastrophic events. With amazing 3D graphics and arcade-like action, your *Magic Carpet*, from Bullfrog, awills you.



Flight Unlimited™

This incredible flight simulator from Looking Glass Technologies, Inc. Features 3D, texture mapped scenery and flying motion so real, you'll want to fasten your seat belt for takeoff.



Tired of games that play in slow motion? Tired of pixels the size of boulders? Tired of 8-bit cartoon colors?

Get 3D Blaster. It will blast you with full-color, hi-res 3D graphics that fly across your screen at light speed.

Plus, it's bundled with five killer 3D games designed for 3D Blaster. And that's not all. Watch the shelves for an avalanche of certified Blaster-compatible titles.

3D Blaster was born to run on Windows® 95, Windows



aster. aming Experience.



The 3D PC Standard

Hi-Octane

Sick of your commute? Take out your frustrations in Bullfrog's combat racing game *Hi-OCTANE*. In a heavily armed hovercar, one wrong move decides who's road king and who is road kill.



NASCAR® Racing

This is no Sunday drive. NASCAR racing, from Papyrus, is the real thing. Strap yourself into a stock car and experience pure, heart-pounding, bumper-to-bumper racing.



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Tired of being left behind? Then upgrade your 486 VL-bus PC with 3D Blaster, the standard in 3D PC. From Creative Labs, the makers of Sound Blaster.

Circle Reader Service #78

WORKS
WITH
WINDOWS®
95



► Corporate Killjoys Develop Software To Kill Games Dead

You knew somebody was going to try it someday. A new program named Unigame for Windows has been developed by Southern-California-based DVD Software to wipe out games on user's hard drives. According to DVD, businesses across the U.S. are losing up to \$50 billion a year as a result of reduced productivity. It's currently combating hindered Windows games (such as Minesweeper and Solitaire) at the Mississippi Workers Compensation Commission, where the Systems Analyst says, "It's not a Gestapo tactic..." She commented further that, "...our productivity levels are not monitored. Perhaps they [the employees] are smoking more instead."

Unigame removes up to 300 games from personal computers—LANs not excepted. Hopefully the higher productivity will more than make up for new losses in absenteeism, nicotine abuse, and therapy for computer game withdrawal.

ON THE SHELF



gernauts. Like WARCRAFT, your objective is to harvest resources, build structures, produce troops, and go out there and give your enemy hell... In WARCRAFT II, humans have been driven from their homeland of Azeroth. Their defense and cause have been commandeered by the king of Lordaeron and the Elves and Dwarves of the Northern regions. Play as the humans and beat back the tide of orc aggression to reclaim your home, and, or be the orcs and stamp out the final pathetic vestiges of human resistance.

Blizzard Entertainment, (800) 953-SNOW

IBM 486/33 CD

Reader Service: #304

Modern Composers Use AMD's New InterWave Technology

Chipmaker Signs Three OEM Partners For Affordable Wavetable Sound

Jan Hammer (composer of the Miami Vice theme), and rock musicians Thomas Dolby and Keith Emerson have joined forces with chipmaker AMD to show off the capability of AMD's InterWave sound chip. The sound processor will be used as the primary wavetable synthesizer chip on three

upcoming PC-peripheral cards from different manufacturers. The 32-voice stereo processor will be featured on two PC-audio sound cards from Reveal, two cards from STB Systems (the ActionTV television tuner adapter card and the Sound Rage32 3D sound card), and a new Advanced Gravis sound card. The sound is marvelous and gamers who purchase the magazine with the Computer Gaming World Extra CD-ROM will be able to judge for them-



selves. AMD commissioned Hammer, Emerson and Dolby to compose songs which would demonstrate the versatility of the chip. On our CD, AMD has provided us with taped soundtracks of those pieces which went directly from chip to DAT.



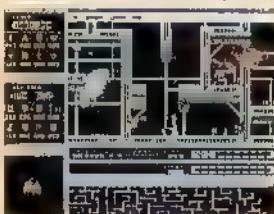
Thomas Dolby, one of the featured artists on Free Wave Jam by Interwave

Head-to-Head Combat Coming to a Modem Near You

Creative Labs has released its new Modem Blaster 28.8 DSVD, a hands-free speaker phone and communications software that allows simultaneous voice and data transfer. All you need is a microphone and a speaker, and you're ready to play head-to-head games while tormenting your opponent with a verbal barrage as you blast him out of existence. Built for Windows 95, the unit comes bundled with software that supports all major on-line services. The Modem Blaster should be available by the time you read this, at an estimated street price of \$230.

THEXDER

THEXDER is a Win 95-only update of the IBM/Commodore 64 game, Action remains limited to blowing up various enemies and hazards Thexder encounters while navigating around the 50 sideways-scrolling levels. Thexder's arsenal and ability to morph into crawling and flying forms increases as you advance through the game. New additions include cinematic interludes, modem and net-



work capability, and a multi-threading option which allows a

player to customize THEXDER's multiple game windows. THEXDER is the latest example of the trend to resurrect vintage arcade and computer games, like Hollywood mines old movies and TV shows. It might be prudent, though, to discern whether the original product is a Casablanca or a Heaven's Gate.

Sierra On-Line (800) 757-7707

IBM CD-ROM

Reader Service: #305

SHIVERS

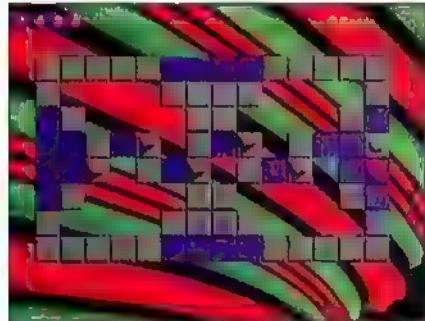
You've been left by your friends, shrimps that they are, to spend the night in an abandoned museum and unravel the mystery of its missing founder, eccentric Professor Windlenot. Escape is possible only after you capture the 10 evil



So, You Want To Be A Game Designer?

There is a school devoted specifically to train you in the techniques. DigiPen, (Vancouver, BC, 604-682-0300), offers a two-year program using the latest equipment from Nintendo. If it sounds great, beware. Attendance is mandatory, six days a week, 13 hours a day. Still, gamers are waiting in line for admittance—a five-year line to be exact. Then there is the Tanner alternative...

Imagine, you've always wanted to be a game designer, yet programming languages such as C++ and BASIC were difficult to learn and timely to master. Then one day you see the Klik & Play design tool from euroPRESS (released in the U.S. by Maxis) and the solution seems obvious. You



Shareware version of Tyler, level A.



this puzzle adventure bills itself as a game for teenagers, adults will enjoy the truly creepy atmosphere. Though the numerous logic-based puzzles are not difficult, the story is somewhat unfocused, and the Ixupi when they do appear, are almost laughably cartoonish. But overall, SHIVERS provides several hours of enjoyable chilling entertainment.

Sierra On-Line, (800) 757-7707

IBM or Mac CD-ROM

Reader Service #306

Ixupi entities who have taken control of the museum. Even though

DEMON DESTROYER GUNN

The DEMON DESTROYER GUNN is one of the more ludicrous pieces of hardware we've seen. The idea seems cool enough: a controller, shaped like a gun, that can be used in shooter games. In reality it appears that someone's trying to make a quick buck by embedding a miniature joystick in some cheap plastic, then charging an outrageous price. The joystick is where a revolver's hammer might be. Button one is the trigger and button

two is on the gun's side. Playing HERETIC, the little joystick controller proved diffi-



Domark Plays Let's Make A Deal

Sim/Action Game Publisher Expands Its Team By Acquiring Three Other Software Companies

In a deal concluded in early December, Domark, Sims, Big Red and Eidos combined forces to add content to its repertoire of simulation and action/adventure games.

While each company will continue to operate under its own name, the joint venture will appear with the holding company name of Eidos Plc.

The merger strengthens Domark's alliance with its publishing partners, including TEN (Total Entertainment Network, designed specifically for computer gamers), 3DO, Sega, Apple and others, and broadens its development teams to publish for a variety of platforms.

Sims, known for its flight simulation products for the PC, has contracted with Domark in the past, beginning in 1989 with Mig 29. Big Red, also in coordination with Domark, has recently

released Tank Commander and Big Red Racing. Eidos is a codec software developer, which promises to add quality FMV to the intros, outros

and provide real-time gaming telephony so you can see and taunt your opponent from across the country before annihilating him.

Also joining Domark is Ian Livingston, who will introduce a new line of action adventure games based upon his (in conjunction with Steve Jackson) popular Fighter Fantasy line of books published by Penguin Books.



Domark's Terracide is a sci-fi, first person combat game.

ing, only in Hollywood, but it can happen. And happen it did—in Wichita, Kansas.

After several months of negotiating, Phillip Tanner, 26, signed a game-development contract with Philips Multimedia to develop 30 more levels of the game. Philips plans to rewrite Tyler's code and graphics to adapt the game to multiple platforms. When asked what he plans to do next, Tanner said he is always entertaining offers from the entertainers.

cult to use with the thumb. It was easier to hold the gun with one hand and move the joystick with the other. The DDG isn't directional; it's just a piece of badly molded plastic with a joystick in it, and even the joystick isn't very good.

Tac Systems, (205) 721-1976, IBM Reader Service #307

CIVNET

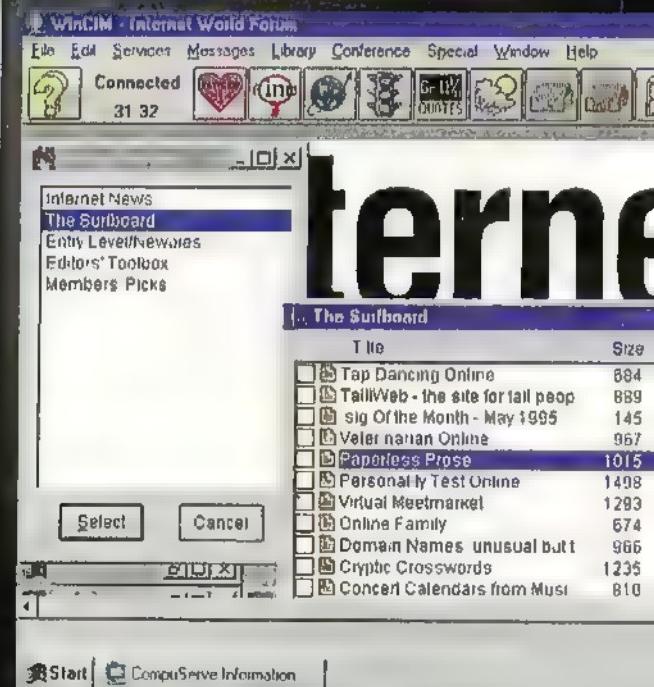
CivNet. Just saying the name will whet the appetite of thirsty gamers.

After years of waiting, the multi-player version of Sid Meier's CIVILIZATION has hit the computer. In 1991, CIVILIZATION revolutionized the empire building genre. Nowhere else could you take the reins of any of a number of civilizations and lead them from the Stone Age to Space Flight. Beginning as a tiny band of settlers, you founded a city, managed it to its maximum potential, built additional settlers to colonize other



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with my friends ndo and Sun City.

My Acer® Aspire™ Desktop helps me stay active—I use it to keep Aspire. To Do More.

up with old friends as well as make new ones. For instance, I

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modem[†]. Teleconference with its integrated speaker-

phone. And play the latest multimedia games using

A few more things.

its five-speed CD-ROM[†] drive, AuraSound™ 3-D

I can do with my Aspire:

stereo speakers and accelerated graphics. Aspire is as easy to

Use voice commands to open programs.

use as it is powerful—I set it up in less than five minutes. And,

Stay in touch with my grandchildren.

it came preloaded with 50 software and reference titles. ACE,

Write electronic checks.

the Acer Computer Explorer, organizes all my software so I can

Keep on top of health issues.

find whatever I want with a simple point and click. And with

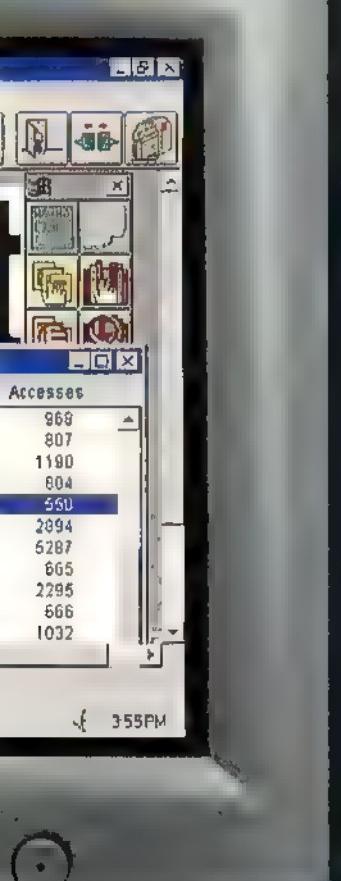
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Windows® 95, an Intel® Pentium® processor, and 16MB of*

And flame my congressman via e-mail.

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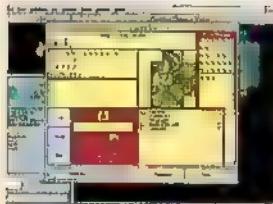
plan myself. With Aspire, I get around better now than I ever did.



Designed for
Microsoft® Windows® 95

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<http://www.acer.com/aac/>*





lands, raised troops for defense, built your cities' infrastructures, and conducted research for discoveries that would propel you from the Stone Age and beyond. The only problem with Civilization was that it couldn't be shared with others. But not anymore. Everything from the original is here, and then some: richer graphics, better AI, and, of course, multiplayer options. You can play over modem, network, hoseal and the Internet! Many of us are addicted to Civilization, and by the looks of it, we're likely to revisit that addiction with CivNet.

**Microprose; (410) 771-1151; IBM 486 CD
Reader Service: #308**

ICEBREAKER

The evil pyramids are out to get you in this woefully mundane action/strategy game. Armed with a plasma blaster, you maneuver around the grid-shaped playing field trying to eradicate them. Pyramids have various degrees of intelligence, mobility, and specialized attributes which grow increasingly tricky as you advance through the 150 levels. Options include a level grid with four



difficulty settings, and a level builder for designing your own challenges. Despite the game's apparent diversity, though, clearing a field of pyramids soon becomes no more interesting than mowing the lawn.

**20th Century Home Entertainment/Magnet Interactive (800) 0996-0011; IBM/Mac CD
Reader Service: #309**

ALLIED GENERAL

Even after months of waiting, the new Windows 95 shine hasn't removed the glint from Patton's Army boots. The Allies have a wonderful array of equipment, then again, they have to face Tiger tanks... The AI is even tougher than in PANZER GENERAL, and the campaigns have variety and depth—especially the Soviet front, where you get kicked all over Mother Russia



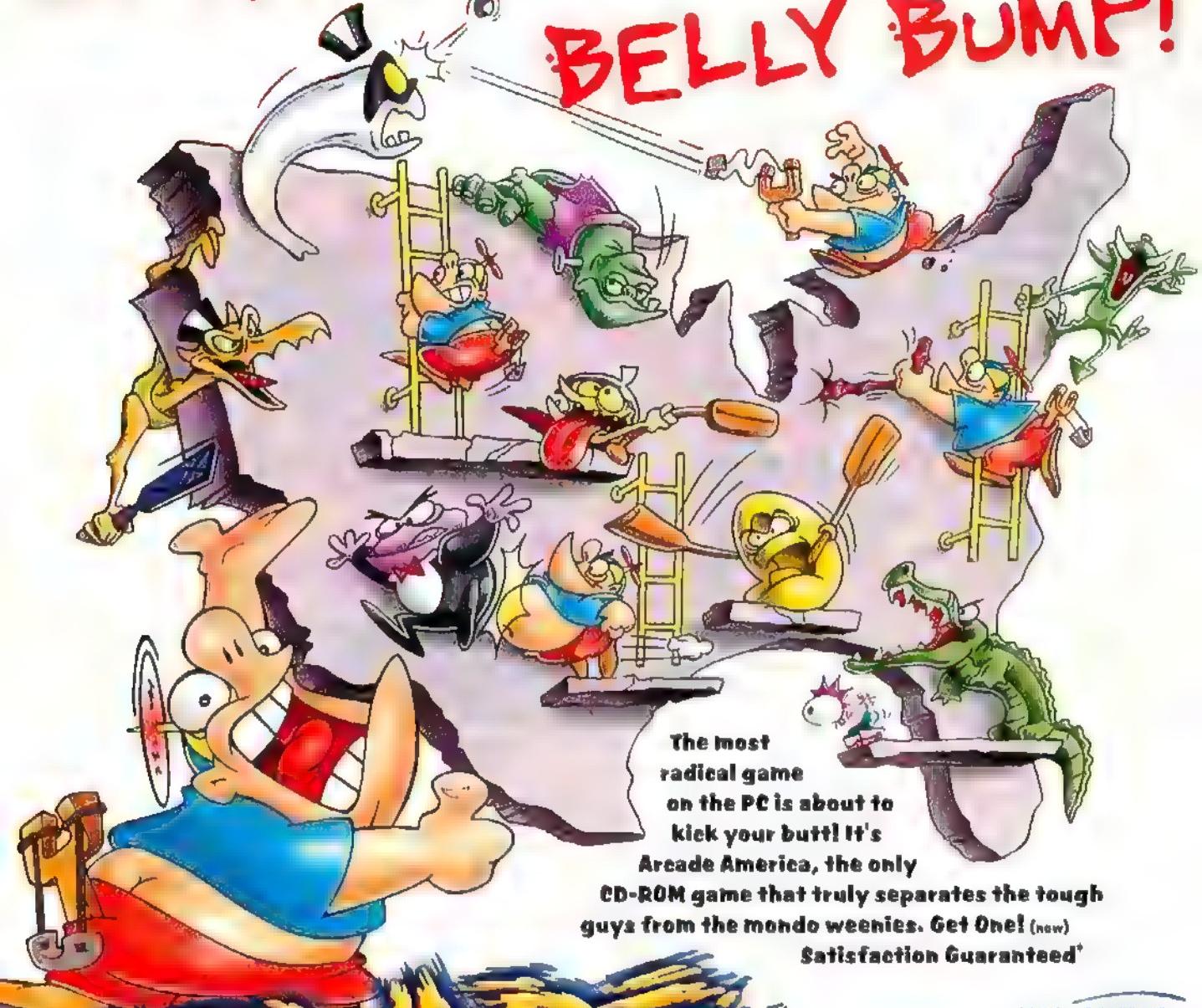
HOT

Software

Hot

Hot

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Want in your face, Mach-speed, pulse-pounding realism, that'll leave you shaking in your space boots? Then brace yourself, as Diamond takes gaming to the edge with a new 3D multimedia accelerator designed for Windows® 95. The Diamond

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Fighter Remix, Interplay's Descent™: Destination Saturn, and NASCAR® Racing. The Diamond EDGE 3D gives you perspective corrected texture-mapped 3D images with the highest frame rates around. Plus a multitude of special effects for a gaming experience so real you'll smell the detonation. With true Plug-and-Play, a 5-year warranty, 24-hour fax-on-demand, and online support services, you'll have a few less things to fear. So, if you're ready for the ultimate challenge contact Diamond at <http://www.diamondmm.com> today. We'll take you as far as you're willing to go.



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Virtua Fighter Remix



SEGA PC



NASCAR Racing

PUSH THE EDGE



Interplay's Descent™: Destination Saturn

DIAMOND
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A passion for performance.

Circle Reader Service #79

SIGHTINGS

Here's an early look at the space invaders that will be vying for room on your hard drive. Some of these games are still months

away, and they aren't even playable yet, but at least you can see what they look like, and get an idea what their intentions are.

Age of Rifles

SSSI's AGE OF RIFLES is one of the most accessible wargames we've seen yet. Although it's too early to see the campaign or judge the AI, the included scenarios, the premise and the engine look solid. For new wargamers, there are quick combat reports, as well as a bar on the bottom of the screen with quick hints on how to manipulate the massive amount of information and troops in each game. Look for



AGE OF RIFLES to hit the stores in the Summer, but if you want to play it sooner, we'll have a demo of the game on our March CG ROM.

Orion Burger

Sanctuary Woods' animated comedy adventure ORION BURGER is named after an intergalactic fast food chain



where earthlings comprise the tasty protein patties. However, the cosmic EPA demands that humans be non-sentient before being turned into Patty melts. So,

you are subjected to wacky IQ tests rigged to make you look like mutton, while an invasion of alien cretins disrupts your home life.

ORION BURGER will feature high-res graphics, hand-drawn cel animation, and professional voice actors.

F-16 Fighting Falcon

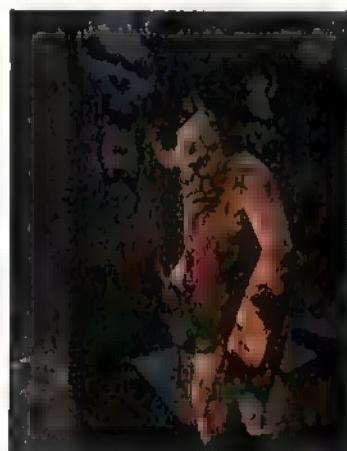
Despite hype you may have already heard about the sim, it turns out that F-16 FIGHTING



FALCON, the upcoming simulation effort from Digital Integration and Interactive Magic, has been delayed until the third quarter of this year. DI is revamping this realistic F-16 simulation to include modern texture-mapped graphics. After seeing TORNADO—a superb sim lacking only in the graphics department—flounder in the US market, this may not be a bad idea.

Galapagos

There is artificial life after all. GALAPAGOS (by Anark) is a 3-D texture mapped world with dangerous and deadly obstacles, and it's your job to guide Mendel, the main character, through them. Mendel is an artificial life form



which adapts and learns quickly, through positive and negative feedback, much like a dog. However, Mendel has a mind of his own and may express

sources. The guys at id Software have always insisted that it would ship "when it was ready," and they're sticking to their words. But we're betting Quake will probably "be ready" sometime in the middle of the spring. Hopefully.

LucasArts

LucasArts' first foray into strategy games is a novel concept: the rule of heaven and hell. AFTERLIFE, which owes much of its interface to SIMCITY, sees you as the custodian of the afterlife. You build

structures and manage the two planes just as they were cities in similar strategy games, except this time, your citizens are dearly departed souls. In addition to making their eternal rest satisfying, you must also manage the caretakers of your



realms—angels and demons—and shepherd certain souls toward reincarnation. AFTERLIFE's heavy dose of puns (you'll cringe at the literal Bat Out Of Hell) and its unique concept should be enough to pique the interest of SIMCITY-fans.

► Hands On

These are the games in development we've actually spent some time playing. They represent some of the most interesting titles

In the Pipeline, and they are complete enough to actually tell how they're going to play. Some of these games will soon be released.

► Touche'—The Adventures of the 5th Musketeer

Anyone expecting this graphic adventure from U.S. Gold to pay tribute to anything but the most basic elements of Alexandre Dumas' *The Three Musketeers* or *Ten Years Later* should look elsewhere. The era of Cardinal Richelieu and the glory associated with the sworn rivals of the elite Cardinal's Guard provide but a backdrop for the

expect French accents—not every British accent from rural Cockney to Manchester street tough. Still, the game affords some clever puzzles, a simple interface, and more than a few laughs for those who do not wince at the sephomoric humor and wonder at what a more compelling implementation of swashbuckling lore might be.

—Johnny L. Wilson
U.S. Gold (415) 693-0297

PC CD-ROM



comedic swashbuckling in this game. The game's animation is reminiscent of LucasArts' classic *THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND* (TSOMI), since the sword fights are done mainly for laughs and do not require any actual reflexes. Yet, *Touche'* offers nothing as clever as the dueling diction of the insult interface in TSOMI, and the voice-acting, though most Americans think any schtick performed with a British accent is de facto hilarious, is distracting. After all, if the game is supposed to take place in France, we would

CRY.SYS

It's the end of the world and you know it, so a group of survivors tuck themselves in for a little cryogenic nap, figuring they'll snooze until the earth is a happy, habitable place again. Unfortunately, the Artificial Intelligence they use has a few defects, and when it's time to wake up, only two people—a man and a woman—are alive. That's bad. What's worse is that the woman is alive, but is being

held hostage in the corrupted AI's virtual wargame. Since you can't re-populate the earth

alone, you have no choice but to use one of 10 Herobots and go in after her. That's the imaginative story line of CRY.SYS, Sierra's new action game. Combining elements from classic arcade games with sophisticated 3D graphics and tons of fun, CRY.SYS

harks back to the simpler, entertaining days of computer gaming. An isometric playing field, similar to CRUSADER: NO REMORSE, but reminding us more of Gauntlet (remember that one?) is the virtual battlefield, where you'll have to navigate seven virtual worlds, each consisting of nine different levels and lots of bad guys.

As you progress and find the numerous power-ups throughout the game, your Herobots (each one has particular strengths, weaknesses and special attacks) attributes improve and they'll acquire better, more powerful weapons. Take hits and your Herobot reflects the damage by losing the ability to move in certain directions and to fire.

The controls are keyboard and mouse-based, and will hopefully be configurable. If all this isn't enough, the World Fabricator will easily let you build your own levels, and Net Play will let you go head-to-head with your friends.

—George Jones

Sierra On Line, Inc., (206) 649-9800

PC and Mac CD-ROM



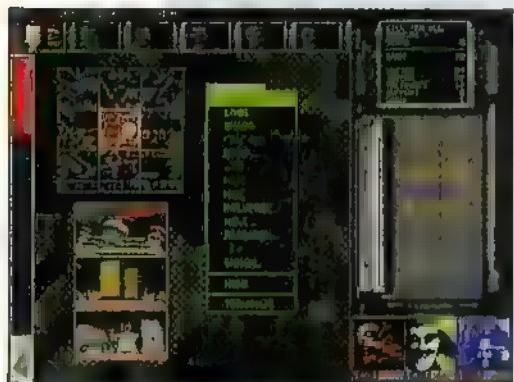
► Chaos Overlord

The future in CHAOS OVERLORD looks awfully familiar. The world

has been united under a single government that has squashed individuality and challenge. Life is complacent and dark, so a new breed of warlords has emerged to make a better life for themselves. These men and women descend into the oppressed cities and create havoc; and from that havoc seize all power and gain control of the city. In short, this premise looks like Blade Runner with gang warfare.

CHAOS OVERLORD, from New World Computing, is a networkable strategy title where you, as a gang lord, impose your own order on the dark world. Rival gang leaders oppose you, and as in other strategy games, you must eliminate them and take their territory. Up to six players

Hands On



can try their hand at ruling the underside of town, where gameplay involves researching new lethal weapons and accessories in order to extort the local businesses for money. Once you terrorize all the citizens you move to the next sector of town for more.

Although the interface is supposed to be easy to learn, at times it can be confusing. It's not that the commands aren't easily accessible, it's that you don't really know what they do. Also, there is a lot of information to process in order to get any kind of handle on the game, and unfortunately, it isn't presented very clearly. Hopefully, proper documentation will alleviate some of these problems.

—Elliott Chinn

New World Computing (818) 889-5600
Mac/Win '95 CD-ROM

NCAA Championship Basketball

With the exception of Electronic Arts' NBA Live '95 title, computer basketball simulation is a contradiction in and of itself, particularly in the college ranks. Bethesda made some inroads with its NCAA Final Four titles but fell a bit short. Now, GTE Interactive is developing a promising college basketball title,

NCAA CHAMPIONSHIP BASKETBALL. It stars 64 authentic NCAA teams and will offer action modes and coaching modes in either exhibition games or a real life NCAA Tournament.

The graphics are pretty slick—the basketball court looks more lifelike than any other hoops game we've seen. And while the motion-captured players look nice, their limited animations could use a little more fleshing out. Gameplay will be a little slower-paced than, say, NBA Live—the designers must favor Rollie Massimino's Villanova stall game—but once the play balancing has been tweaked (balls were still bouncing 15 feet off the rim on missed layups), NCAA should be a lot of fun. Just being able to play college ball will make some fans happy.

The feature that fascinates us most, however, is the one thing no other bas-



ketball game, or any sports game for that matter, has dealt with college players get older and graduate. GTE's attempting to integrate a model where players play for four years (or less), graduate, and are replaced by recruited freshman. Although implementing the actual recruiting process may be tough (NCAA tycoon?), giving college players careers, a la the Front Page Sports games, is a great idea.

It's still about a month and a half off (GTE is promising to finish the game by March Madness), but we can't wait to see if **NCAA CHAMPIONSHIP BASKETBALL** will be a real player.

George Jones

GTE Interactive (619) 431-8801

PC CD-ROM

PIPELINE

Estimated release dates based on the latest information from developers.

GAME NAME, COMPANY	RELEASE DATE
Age of Rifles SSI	2/96
Alexander the Great SSI	3/96
Alien Trilogy Acclaim	4/96
All-American College Football '95 Micro Sports	2/96
Callahan's Saloon Legend New World	Spring 96
Chaos Overlord New World	Q1/96
Chessmaster 5000 Mindscape	4/96
Conquest of New World Interplay	2/96
CRY.SIS Sierra	2/96
Daggerfall Bethesda	Q1/96
Dungeon Keeper Bullfrog/EA	2/96
Earthslayer II Sierra	3/96
Fantasy General SSI	3/96
Guardians of Destiny Virgin	Q2/96
History of the World Avalon Hill	8/96
Invulnerables Bullfrog/EA	Summer 96
Magic of Xanth Legend	Fall 96
Magic the Gathering MicroProse	Spring '96
Master of Orion 2: Battle of Antares MicroProse	Spring '96
MegaRace 2 Mindscape	4/96
Metal Lords New World	3/96
Monty Python & Holy Grail 7th Level	Q2/96
NCAA Championship Basketball GTE Interactive	3/96
Over the Reich Avalon Hill	6/96
Pax Imperia II Blizzard	Q1/96
Panzerblitz Avalon Hill	3/96
Realms of Arkania 3 Sir Tech	3/96
Return to Krondor 7th Level	6/96
Ripper Take 2	Spring 96
Rise II: Resurrection Acclaim	2/96
Sid Meier's Civilization 2000 MicroProse	Spring '96
Space Bucks Impressions/Sierra	2/96
Spycraft Activision	2/96
Star Fleet Academy Interplay	Summer 96
Super Heroes MicroProse	Spring '96
Terra Nova Virgin	3/96
The Last Blitzkrieg SSG	Q1/96
Theme Hospital Bullfrog/EA	4/96
Third Reich Avalon Hill	6/96
Touche U.S. Gold	3/96
X-Com 3: The Apocalypse MicroProse	Fall 96
Wing Commander IV Origin	2/96
Wizardry Gold Sir Tech	3/96

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DEVELOPED BY



bad mojo

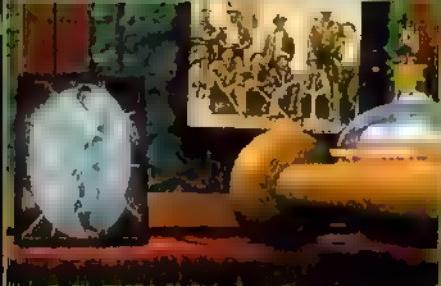
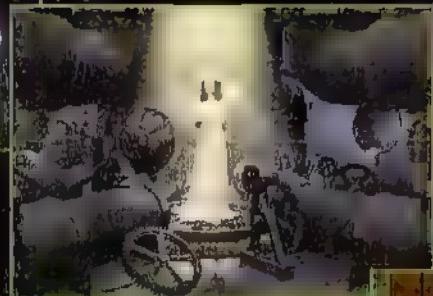
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MURKIN LEE

Knight of Diamonds



GABRIEL KNIGHT 2's Blend of Suspense And The Supernatural Is A Full House For Gamers

by Johnny L. Wilson

When I saw the initial GABRIEL KNIGHT game, I raved about it as "...an exceptional blend of art, game and understanding." GABRIEL KNIGHT 2: THE BEAST WITHIN is even more so. The story is fascinating, the writing is deft, the acting is well above the computer game norm, and the soundtrack is near perfect.

Those who have never experienced a Gabriel Knight adventure will need to know that Gabriel, the protagonist, is a bookstore owner from New Orleans. In the first game, he is a wannabe novelist who, with assistance from his female associate Grace, ends up solving a series of voodoo murders and writing a best-selling novel based on his efforts. The game's story was a study in contrasts, light vs. darkness, black vs. white, logic vs. the supernatural, and dream sequences vs. reality. By the end of the story, Gabriel becomes a schattenjaeger, a hunter of the supernatural. With its sophisticated handling of psychological archetypes and titillating use of the supernatural, the original game was as much a work of interactive literature as it was a game.

GABRIEL KNIGHT 2: THE BEAST WITHIN (GK2) takes the quality up another notch. This time, the schattenjaeger has taken up residence in the family castle in Germany and, as a result of his mystical responsibilities, must solve a case which borders suspiciously on lycanthropic behavior. It maintains the sophisticated dream sequences which foreshadowed both danger, solutions and inner turmoil in the first game, as well as a well-defined symbolism. St. George continues to hold the place of light in GK2, and there is an interesting interplay between the swan and the wolf. By the time the adventure is through, gamers will have linked Ludwig II of Bavaria, Richard Wagner and a few historical liberties in a most remarkable plot.

GK2 also provides more balance between the principal characters. In the original, Gabriel's associate Grace is definitely a supporting character. In GK2, she has equal weight with Gabriel, allowing gamers to view the story from more than one perspective—more story and movie than traditional game.

The new game retains the style of clever dialogue used in the



► WHO IS ME? Grace, Gabriel's assistant, takes a much more aggressive role in GK2. In this standard interface shot, she interviews a city official.

original. Sometimes, this is handled as throwaway humor and sometimes with profound foreshadowing. I was amused when a fireplace was described as adequate for the big bad wolf to come down in a story about werewolves, but I particularly liked the way Gabriel would allude to the case with double-entendres. When a Hunt Club member asks Gabriel if he hunts, he quizzically responds, "I hunt. I hunt all the time." Another time a suspect complains to Gabriel that, "No matter how much I spray them down, they still stink." Gabriel retorts, "Yeah, I guess some creatures are like that." These are very nice touches within the context. Some of Grace's lines seem unnaturally testy at first, but as noted later in this review, it actually works.

The first adventure offered high production values in sound and music. In GK2, Composer Robert Holmes and his colleagues raise the bar further by using the operatic style made famous by John Williams in *Star Wars* (different theme music for each character) so that Gabriel's theme has a heavy lugubrious counterpoint, Grace's theme is a delicate and romantic melody blending piano and harp. Even such minor characters as a police inspector has a theme with a martial percussion. Certain locales like the Rittersberg church and the secret passage also have their own themes. I also liked the delightful guitar version of "When The Saints Go Marching In" at the

Once time going to log this, even though I spent no time if its complete garage or not, just in case it means something later on. Mrs. Smith did Gabriel's test and more. Originally, we chose that there's "the high priestess" - a powerful feminine spirit guide trying to save Gabriel about that black wolf stuff and assist him because Gabriel is in deep do do. He apparently got the oral nature "year," death and winter) and he's going to be going through one of his possible transformations. The spirit guide is trying to help him pick the right one - supposedly not just for him (Gabriel) but for himself and/or someone she represents as well (maybe one of his old customers).



WAS IST DAS? When examining an item in inventory, such as Grace's notebook shown here, you will get this close-up view.

Marienplatz fountain during Chapters 1 (where author Jane Jensen makes her Hitchcockian cameo) and 3.

METAPHOR METAMORPHOSIS

The first game used the visual metaphor of a graphic novel (a book in the style of comic book art for mature readers) to unfold the story. The New Orleans settings and backgrounds looked a lot like what you would expect to see in a Dark Horse Comic. Players navigated from location to location using a tourist map interface where all the famous sites appear as colorful icons whenever the character learns of a clue.

GK2 uses the film metaphor. Nathan and Darlou Gams have blended the photographic backgrounds and digitized video (using a chromakey or green screen process) almost seamlessly, so that the whole look is significantly better than the video with rendered backgrounds of PHANTASMAGORIA. Actors move in front of actual Bavarian locales with photographic resolution, and it is very effective. Players navigate from place to place using an actual mass transit map of Munich (for Gabriel) and a



WAHS FROM THE CRYPT Grace encounters Gerda grieving at a local crypt. This moving scene shows how well the photographs and video have been integrated in GK2.

tourist map of Bavaria (for Grace) with active locations appearing as the characters learn about them.

Best of all, the digitized film sequences don't get in the way of the game. A mouse click will let you bypass a sequence and, whenever a walker (the on screen character moving through a scene) needs to traverse the entire screen (such as at the Marienplatz of Munich), there is a fast forward icon that moves the character to the next virtual fork in the road. As for the film sequences themselves, a variety of styles in close-ups and other camera angles are directed with flair by Will Binder and some sequences use an entirely different look. The posterized wolf's-eye view and the television camera view in Chapter 3 were particularly effective in adding visual variety, as was the Francis Ford Coppola-esque opera staging of the final chapter.

Another fresh look occurs when Grace investigates some castles. Not only can the player click on various objects and locations, but there is a button to click which plays a docent tape and allows the player to discover more about each sight. This adds to vocal variety so that players don't always have to hear the character's voice describing each object or locale.

Frankly, the film clips are paced so well and spaced so effectively throughout the game that they often serve as mini-reward sequences. They are generally exciting enough to keep you pushing from puzzle to puzzle in order to see more and more of the story evolve. Unlike many games which utilize any sort of interactive movie technology, I found myself experiencing delighted anticipation

rather than frustrating impatience whenever the hour-glass icon would signify that the program was calling up a film sequence. Of course, the fact that I could skip scenes I'd already seen enhanced that feeling that the film clips were rewards for a triumphant puzzle solver.

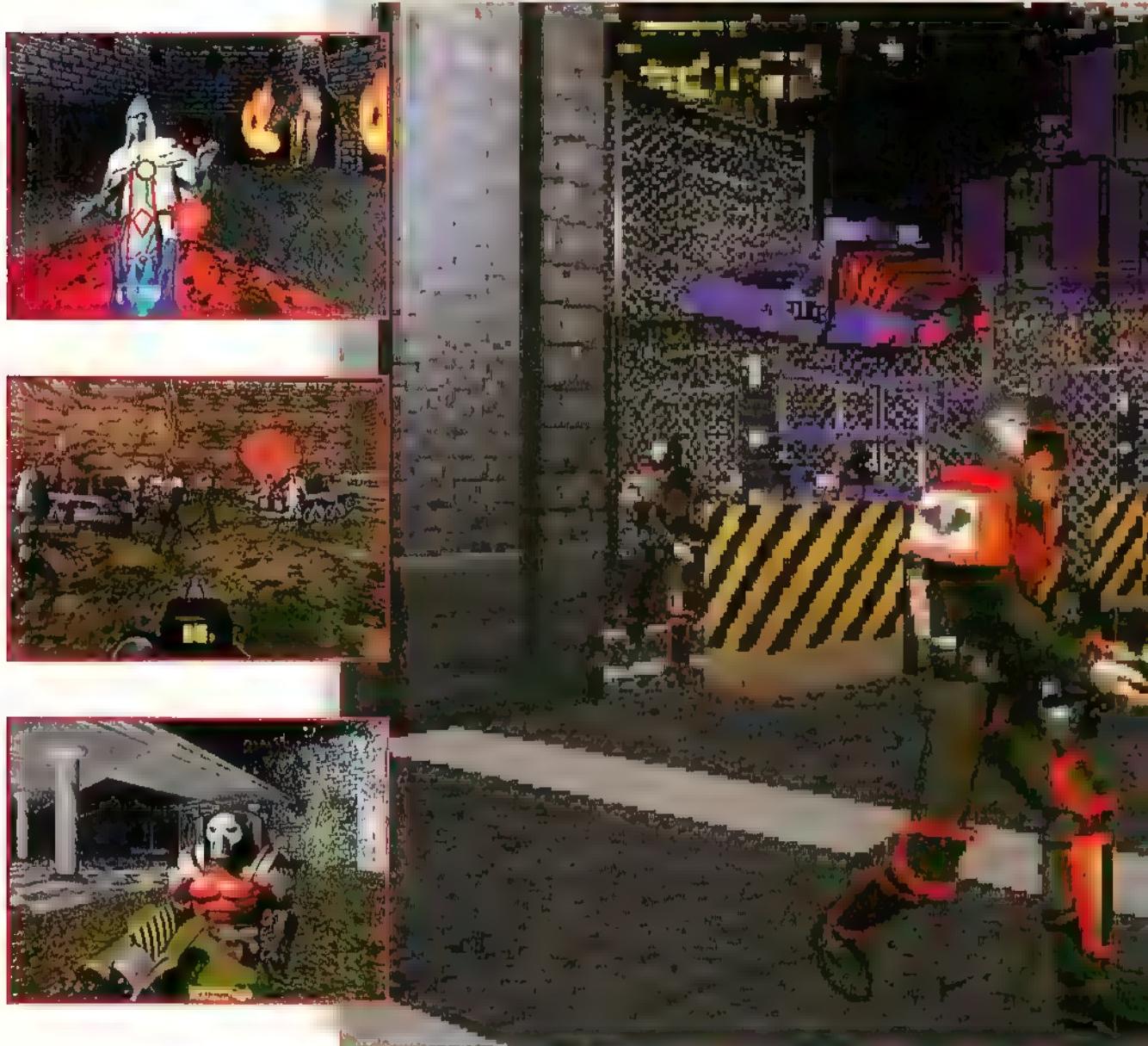
CHARACTER TRANSFORMATIONS

From the start, the characters in the Gabriel Knight adventures have been characters with solid motivation and inner conflict. In GK2, the digitized performances make the characters even more believable. To be sure, some of the performances are "over the top" in a near-melodramatic perspective (Xavier, the Hunt Club door man, and Mrs. Smith, the cliché-ridden demonologist from Pennsylvania, come to mind), but most of the performances are both credible and pleasing. As a cast, I think they offer the most even quality of performance,



LOVE STORY The paintings depicting Wagner's Tannhauser provide additional clues to the mystery, and the Tour Tape button adds vocal variety to the harvesting of the clues.

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► MAPPED METAPHORS The tourist map of Bavaria and the mass transit map of Munich provide the travel interfaces for GK2.

from Dean Erickson's Gabriel Knight through the lowest-ranking supporting character

To complement the characterization, GK2 offers plenty of dramatic tension to bring the characters into focus. Grace is played to sardonic perfection by Joanne Takahashi. One quickly understands that her bitter view of the world is as much rage turned inward as it is rivalry with Gabriel and jealousy of Gerda. Of course, Kriminalkommissar Leber's territorial protection of his professionalism and the hostile paranoia of von Zell, one of the Royal Bavarian Hunt Club members, add to the opportunities for dramatic interaction. Flare ups and tender reconciliations abound in GK2.

PUZZLING TRANSMOGRIFICATIONS

Most importantly, the puzzles aren't dumbed down to reach a broader audience. Though some are relatively simple, some are diabolically clever. Nearly everyone will immediately know what to do with the quick drying cement or mirror image puzzles, but some will have trouble figuring out the tape-splicing puzzles and the cuckoo clock. Plus, the pacing of each investigation isn't bogged down by having every clue delivered via a short movie.



► ANGEL OR DEVIL? Gabriel examines his inventory to decide what he might share with his attorney.

Clues are to be found by reading books (with or without the accompanying voiceover), examining museum artifacts, interviewing witnesses in film clips, and listening to audio clips. This is extremely positive because it lends variety to the game. Unfortunately, one disease common to most modern adventure games still infests GK2—pixelitis. On several occasions, gamers will have to find and click on a precise spot to get the next clue,

even when they think they have already clicked there. This is particularly true in Chapter 1 when the key is hidden in a dark shadow, and Chapter 4 when you must click on a display case on the exact corner twice.

You'll also have to keep returning to most locations several times before you solve everything, but that's a common adventure game convention. Thankfully, Jensen has divided your progress into 697 points of information-gathering/puzzle solving, so you feel like every incremental point counts and know when you're making progress. Fortunately, the blinking cursors on the map symbols let you know when you haven't yet collected all the clues or performed all the actions in a given location.

The only unfair clue I can remember in the game is the magazine/tape recorder schtick in Chapter 3. Now that I've mentioned it, the reference may come in handy when you've reached the end of your patience. Still, the blend of history and clever storytelling make the exposition of the plot a joy, in spite of occasional clumsiness in the puzzle system.

WEREWAGNER

Plot, puzzles, characterization and art all lead to one of the most ambitious denouements ever in graphic adventure game history. The lost-opera-of-Wagner scene is worthy of a film epic. It offers tense moments, comic relief, and a fascinating catharsis. We've always believed that a significant amount of production resources should be spent in rewarding the gamer who plays all the way through the game. GABRIEL KNIGHT 2: THE BEAST WITHIN transforms game endings—a dynamic finish to a most dynamic game. Jane Jensen just may have become the interactive Anne Rice she's always wanted to be.

►APPEAL: Readers of Anne Rice-style gothics and traditional graphic adventure gamers are in for a rare treat in this one.

►PROS: Great story, extravagant backgrounds, exceptional acting, and a near-perfect soundtrack makes this a graphic adventure benchmark.

►CONS: Some puzzles may be obscure enough to seem unfair.



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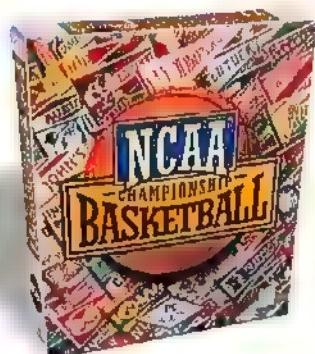
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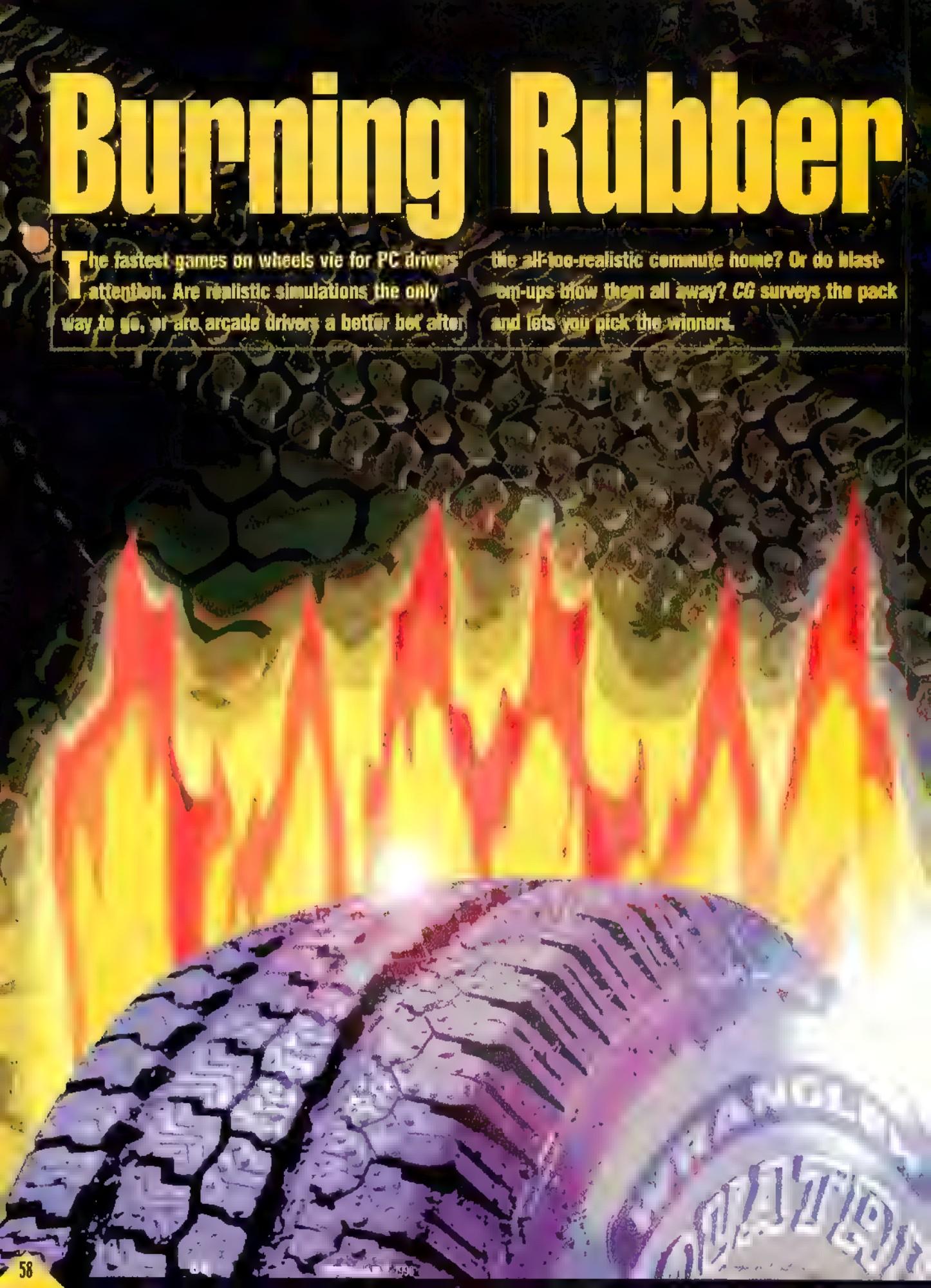
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Burning Rubber

A dramatic illustration of a tire burning in flames, with a dark, textured background.

The fastest games on wheels vie for PC drivers' attention. Are realistic simulations the only way to go, or are arcade drivers a better bet after

the all-too-realistic commute home? Or do blast-ups blow them all away? CG surveys the pack and lets you pick the winners.

Racing Simulations

Ain't Nothin' Like The Real Thing, Baby

by Gordon Gable

Arcade, shmarcade. When you're ready to duke it out with the big boys, simulations are the only games that count. Here, there's no such thing as a loop or a leap, ultra laser death ray, or some long-haired driver named Surfer Dude. All you'll get are the most realistic depictions of real life racing available—the only true test of one's driving abilities.

And, judging by the vaporware and unfulfilled expectations we've seen over the last few years, the auto-racing sim sub-genre is a hard club to successfully join. In my humble opinion, only five programs have scaled the lofty heights and climbed into to the Racing Sim Hall of Fame: INDIANAPOLIS 500: THE SIMULATION (1989), WORLD CIRCUIT (1992), INDYCAR RACING (1993), NASCAR RACING (1994), and the latest inductee, INDYCAR RACING II. It's no fluke that all but one (MicroProse's WORLD CIRCUIT) have hailed from those motoring magicians at Papyrus Design Group—they started the revolution in 1989 and have been directing it ever since.

MAKING IT REAL

To be considered a simulation, a program must adhere to rigid guidelines. For starters, it must incorporate an authentic car feel with elements such as tires that grip when heated, yet slip when



► **AAUGH! THE POLYGONS!** INDIANAPOLIS 500: THE SIMULATION ushered in a new level of play realism, but the crashes were a bit lacking.

pushed too far; real-time acceleration and braking, and the visual impression that you really are going 180 mph).

Sim racers view the action from the cockpit, avoiding contact with other cars to prevent damage. In realistic sims, drivers quickly discover that only a smooth, consistent driving style and sticking to the racing "line" will win races. A proper mechanical set-up and judicious pit stops are equally important. Replays are a must in a good sim—if not to relive one's glory, then to act as an after-the-fact dri-

ving instructor. Statistics should be plentiful and thorough, and support for wheel and pedal units is now mandatory. Computer opponents must display at least moderate intelligence, and racing venues should represent real life tracks.

It's a darned difficult combination to get right, and those developers who have should be considered nothing short of brilliant. So, in



► **DRIVING ON THE LEFT** WORLD CIRCUIT, an Import from MicroProse UK, included plenty of aids to help keep beginning drivers on the track.

chronological order, let's take a quick peek at the programs that have made it into the Racing Simulation Hall of Fame.

THE FOUNDING FATHERS

Modern racing simulation arguably started with INDIANAPOLIS 500: THE SIMULATION, developed for Electronic Arts by Papyrus. Sure, the graphics in this EGA PC and Amiga game look blocky and primitive now, but back in '89 Indy 500 changed the way we look at auto racing games. It had only one place to drive, the fabled Indianapolis Motor Speedway. But the game more than compensated for this with extensive, true-to-life car modifications. The transmission was an automatic and acceleration was digital, but the rear view mirrors worked, and wrecked cars stayed on the track for that added demolition derby effect.

The only successful attempt at reproducing the elite Formula 1 environment came in 1993 with WORLD CIRCUIT. This product ended a four-year drought in the world of competent racing sims, and to this day is the subject of numerous on-line message threads and racing contests. It's not quite as horrifyingly real as the latter day Papyrus sims, but one might argue that that is what made it so downright fun. Despite admirably realistic driving characteristics, this remains the sim for those who can't or won't spend hours in training and car set-up mode. As an added bonus, several driving aids that could be switched on or off on the fly meant driving time for any level of play.

er WORLD CIRCUIT also sported a couple of multedriver modes, including modem play and the never-since-duplicated "two players/one computer/one joystick" feature. Opponent AI was questionable, and a short replay left us wanting more, but it was easy to see beyond these things and enjoy a thoroughly superb product.

The second release from the Papyrus stable, INDYCAR RACING, took



EVERYTHING BUT THE 'BACCI The SVGA graphics in NASCAR Racing make crashes all the more fun.

auto race sims into a new level of realism and danger. It also signaled the encroachment of processor intensive texture mapping into racing sims, and this is when it all began to get very serious. Auto racing was no longer a matter of who could go fast and who couldn't. Now there was a gaggle of modifications that almost warranted a digital mechanic's license, and car modeling that was in a very difficult league of its own. This time around, all the INDYCAR circuits were depicted (with add-on packs, anyway), and there were monstrously long RAM-dependent replays, a paint kit, and breakable machinery. It featured what is possibly the best track representation ever to hit the screen: California's Laguna Seca, corkscrew et al.



SECOND LAP INDYCAR 2's updated graphics and much-improved AI move it to the front of the pack.

THE SVGA AGE

While INDYCAR's textures made for a better-looking game, it was the addition of high-res SVGA graphics in 1994's NASCAR RACING that brought a high sense of realism—if you had the necessary hardware. Modern racing sims require top-of-the-line computers to get good performance and detail.

Driving a NASCAR behemoth isn't anything at all like piloting a nimble formula car

Suddenly you understand the NASCAR "train," the meaning of the word *concentration*, and why a tight corner seems to bring these cars to a crawl.

From magnificent audio to break-apart cars that continue to function with three tires and a departed hood, NASCAR RACING brought a real racing environment home. It also brought home the fact that Papyrus was in this racing game for keeps, and that their intention was to keep things very real and very tough (remember Bristol?).

The newest entry in the racing stable is INDYCAR II, also from Papyrus (see the review, page 74). This sim elevates the open wheelers to the same high-resolution as NASCAR. It's absolutely gorgeous, even when things go wrong—collisions may result in your car being reduced to a mere pod, bereft of wheels, body parts and engine. Extreme instances of such carnage may even involve the disappearance of driver's helmets from the cockpits. Of course, this sort of horror would involve backtracking at tremendous speeds for the sole purpose of a 400 mph meeting, and just what sort of sicko would want to do that?

Opponent AI has been radically improved from its predecessor, computer cars recognize the appearance of an imperfect human, and make the necessary adjustments. One might say that the AI drivers are getting downright mannerly.

Coming Soon

As this issue went to press, the final version of the much-anticipated GRAND PRIX II hadn't emerged from the garage. But if the beta is any indication, GRAND PRIX II will be an audio/visual masterpiece, with high-res texture-mapping, light-source shading, and 3-D sound. It's not actually a sequel to a program called Grand Prix, but rather to WORLD CIRCUIT. (Spectrum/MicroProse has adopted WORLD CIRCUIT RACING as their new brand name for racing sims, so the title will be WORLD CIRCUIT RACING's GRAND PRIX II. Confused yet?)

Pieced together by Geoff Crammond and many of the same people responsible for WORLD CIRCUIT, GRAND PRIX I comes from good stock, and the beta shows flashes of brilliance. Cars behave in a fashion reminiscent of its predecessor, but are faster, harder to control, and will actually grab some air when they're off tracking. The word is that an associated program, GRAND PRIX MANAGER, will be a strategist's dream.



TAKING THE CURVE GRAND PRIX II looks set to give INDYCAR II a challenge, but so far it's remained just around the corner.

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One part Ferrari.
5 parts Sherman Tank.



Apparently, nuclear bombs
cause mutations in cars, too.



Arcade Racing

For More Smiles Per Gallon, Arcade Cars Are Your Ticket To Ride

by Scott A. May

Let racing purists spin their wheels, mired in the minutiae of fuel mixtures, rubber compounds and chassis designs. Mainstream driving fans know what really matters isn't found in the pits, but on the tarmac: heart pounding, full tilt driving action. Strategy takes a back seat to the adrenaline pumping excitement behind the wheel, as you slam the pedal through the floor and consume asphalt with insatiable hunger. When speed's the thing, it doesn't get any better than this.

CARTRIDGE ENVY

Mindscape's AL UNSER JR. ARCADE RACING is a no-frills Windows 95 speed demon. Among the products covered here, this one offers the most basic, gut-level ride. Mindscape's target audience is undoubtedly new PC users lamenting their old 16-bit cartridge games.

Strictly a single-player game, ARCADE RACING offers a choice of 10 generic Indy-style cars, three levels of difficulty, and 15 courses of various design, length and lap count. There are three racing modes to choose from: practice, timed and championship. Timed races recall classic coin-op road trips, where you have to complete each lap before the counter reaches zero. Championship mode pits you against 10 computer-controlled drivers, racing sequentially through the entire 15-course circuit.

ARCADE RACING is an easy game to get into and out of, for those who crave the scent of burning rubber but don't have a lot of time. Optional racing music, ranging from buzz guitar riffs to bouncy Euro-

pop, helps set the pace. Graphics are good, but not exceptional, consisting mostly of polygonal trackside objects and watercolor-style backdrops. Graphic levels can be adjusted to suit your taste or help speed the frame rate on slower machines.



► MOUNTAIN HIGH Network play and a variety of dazzling locales help keep SCREAMER's tires spinning

The game's great weakness is sheer repetition. Even with 15 courses to choose from, each lap eventually blends into the next. Touchy game controls are also a sore point: traditional analog joysticks and steering yokes are almost useless, causing even the most steady-handed driver to oversteer and bounce off the retaining walls. Opt instead for digital gamepads, or even the keyboard for more exacting control. Another drawback: collisions slow you down, but cause no appreciable damage to your vehicle. Likewise, it's impossible to spin out. Overall, ARCADE RACING is fast and fun, but not likely to remain on your play list for very long.

SCREAMING FOR MORE

Virgin Interactive's SCREAMER takes a quantum leap towards real coin-op style arcade racing on the PC. This DOS-based game offers a lot of bang for the buck, including network play, responsive controls, sensational sound effects, and absolutely dazzling graphics. Only three courses are available, but they are whoppers—Palm Town, Lake Valley and Lindburg. Each twists and turns through realistic urban and country settings, filled with high banks, rolling hills, tunnels, bridges and other hazards designed to keep you sharp.

Drivers choose from different NASCAR-style racers, each available in automatic and manual transmissions. Racing options include adjustable race lengths (3, 5, 10 or 25 laps), three levels of difficulty and three levels of graphic detail. Optimized code allows the game to



► QUICK SPIN Al Unser Jr. ARCADE RACING is fun for a quick racing fix, but after a few dozen laps the magic's over.

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scream along with a smooth frame rate, at highest detail, even on a 486-class machine. Graphics are remarkable in standard 320 x 200 VGA, but really come alive in 640 x 480 SVGA. To achieve this higher level, however, you'll need 12 MB of RAM.



ROAD WARRIOR If you've been craving a chance to tear down city streets in a Viper, **THE NEED FOR SPEED** provides a cheaper fix than your local Dodge dealer.

SCREAMER's graphic details overwhelm the senses, from the texture-mapped store fronts of the city streets to the majestic crowns of mountain peaks. Ambulance animation also makes it difficult to keep from gazing, as flags wave along the boulevards, monstrous signs rotate, jumbo jets streak the sky, and helicopters buzz right over the course. Even the sound effects are exceptional, shifting in stereo to reflect your immediate surroundings. A pop up CD player lets you choose from seven electrifying musical sound tracks, complete with volume controls.

SIMPLE OR SIMULATION?

Bridging the gap between racing sims and arcade driving games is Electronic Arts' **THE NEED FOR SPEED**. Aesthetically, this game is a stunner—the culmination of years of excellent racing design from the old pros at Distinctive Software (**TEST DRIVE I** and **II**, **STUNTS** and **GRAND PRIX CIRCUIT**). The big differences between this and the other games mentioned here are performance and polish. Everything about this game looks, feels and sounds authentic, capturing much of the depth of a simulation without forfeiting the fun of arcade racing.

Unlike the previous titles' generic racers, **THE NEED FOR SPEED** offers real, blistering street machines like the Corvette ZR-1, Dodge Viper, Ferrari 512TR and Lamborghini Diablo. Of course, racing these spirited beauties on mundane tracks just wouldn't do. In addition to standard closed loop tracks, there are a series of spectacular courses, ranging from full-throttle country settings to coastal gauntletts and precarious mountain ridges. Besides fellow racers, road hazards include off-track obstacles, slow-moving civilian traffic and one of the

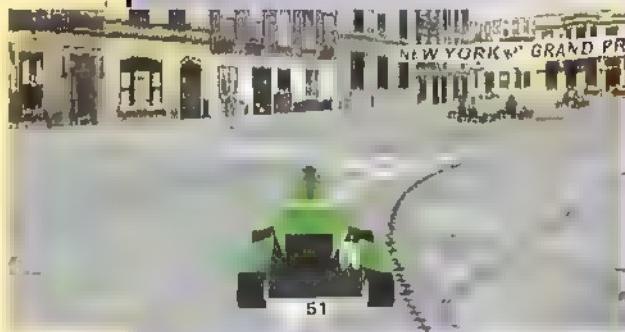
designer's longtime favorite ploys, the ever-present highway patrol. The game's driving controls are easily the best of the bunch, performing well with standard analog sticks, but really coming alive with steering yoke and floor pedals.

Extras include VCR-style replay modes, where you can view spectacular end-over-end crashes in slow motion. The program will even decide which segments are particularly riveting and automatically record these in the **Highlight Reel** for later review. Like **SCREAMER**, the graphics here are fantastic, drawn in striking detail and vibrant colors. View modes include a behind-the-dash perspective complete with fully functional cockpit displays. You can also race full-screen, behind the car (chase view), or from a special three-quarter sky-cam view. Frame rate is excellent, but you'll need a Pentium to enjoy jitter-free driving, especially in 640 x 480 SVGA. Owners of 486 machines may want to think twice before investing in this beauty.

Shopping Karts

Veteran drivers tired of the same old Indy Car, stock car and street rod games will find a delightful new twist in MicroProse's **VIRTUAL KARTS**. The first true go-kart racing game for the PC, this hot little number offers fast and furious action.

There's a certain visceral thrill in skimming along at high speeds, your butt mere inches from the farnac, in a vehicle barely larger than your own body. Choose from three engine classes, depending on the course and your level of expertise: a 4-cycle scooter for beginners, a 100cc for experienced drivers, and a



125cc shifter for all-out thrill seekers. Courses include a variety of professional closed-circuit tracks, as well as high-strung runs through the streets of San Francisco, Baltimore and New York, rendered with exacting detail to their real-life locales.

Competition ranges from practice laps to single-player races against a roster of feisty computer-controlled drivers. The biggest kick, however, is network play, where up to eight people can compete simultaneously. The action is full-bore and more than a little madcap, often resembling a high-speed game of bumper cars. Once the novelty wears down and drivers of equally-matched talents go head-to-head, the game delivers some of the most rousing action seen in any game of the genre. Controls are light and responsive, with kart performance directly affected by options for tire class, gear ratios and track conditions (dry, wet or icy). Don't let **VIRTUAL KARTS**' diminutive stature fool you—this pint-sized powerhouse is an absolute blast.

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7th Guest™ has finally arrived. This PC CD-ROM game fuses

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*"Gee Wally, Mrs. Ckaver
isn't so nice anymore."*

worth the wait? Well, we think it's totally killer.



*Nineteen puzzles kill precious
time, as well as brain cells.*



It's finally arrived.

Car Wars

When Driving 100 Mph Just Isn't Enough...

by Peter Olafson

In the future, driving will be a blast: we will evidently have even more and bigger weapons in our cars than some of us do now. I know this because I've been playing a raft of next-generation driving games in which drivers do not simply humiliate opponents by beating them to the finish line, but add injury to insult by blowing them to kingdom come along the way. Blame it on *Mad Max*, which added the expression "post-apocalyptic war zone" to the nat onal vocabulary. Or on the fact that prudence and safety while altogether admirable things in real life, are not especially dashing or fun when encased in a computer game. Explosions are fun. Beating people with a lead pipe until they run off the road is fun. Using a rocket launcher to rip them a new tailpipe is fun.

Driving the speed limit, not cutting people off and turning right on red only when safe may be a futuristic fantasy, but it does not win the hearts and minds of gamers. None of this is especially new, of

DESTRUCTION DERBY

DESTRUCTION DERBY (Psygnosis) is a perfect illustration of the potential of this aggressive artform, and it's about as civilized as this sort of game gets. Which is to say not very. It is a celebration of that automotive staple of the American heartland—the demolition derby—in which drivers use their cars as battering rams to do as much damage as humanly possible to other cars. The last one that can still move, wins.

In that respect, it's a great simulation. The high-speed collisions of the texture-mapped cars are convulsive and realistic. The first time you see one—or feel one, in first-person view—it'll be all you can do to stop from bouncing off the back of your seat (can a computer game cause whiplash? Psygnosis will be hearing from my lawyer...).

DESTRUCTION DERBY has never-seen-before quality that will instantly make it a showpiece game to demonstrate to open-mouthed friends and relatives (apart from the addition of new graphics here and there, it's effectively identical to the PlayStation version). What's especially marvelous—and unprecedented for this sort of game—is the detail in which car damage is addressed. Hoods crumple to steeper and steeper angles, doors cave in, steering and speed deteriorate, steam begins to erupt from a ruptured radiator and eventually turns an oily black when you're out of commission.

However, for a game so unapologetically entertaining, DESTRUCTION DERBY's useful life span is surprisingly short. The main drawback: the demo derby arena and half-dozen stock-car tracks are all dead flat—a limitation of the game engine—and after a few rounds you'll crave new and creative ways to wreak havoc. A little STUNT TRACK RACER sensibility would have helped: imagine DESTRUCTION DERBY with elevated segments, ramps, jumps, loops and banked curves. Imagine a track editor. Hopefully they'll keep this in mind for the planned followup. (Sony Interactive's TWISTED METAL—a PlayStation conversion due in March—should offer a taste of this vertical dimension, with weapons to boot). Despite its limitations, this is a great game, but it has a lot more potential.

WIPEOUT

WIPEOUT (also from Psygnosis) covers well-trod territory, but nevertheless makes the old new again. Hovercraft racing has been done many times before, but rarely with such svelte assurance. You glide a needle-nosed craft along a narrow track over steep hills, across canyon-sized jumps and roller coaster curves, all the time collecting power-ups—rockets, missiles, mines, shields and speed boosts—and use them to gain ground on your rivals (it's impossible to destroy the competition in WIPEOUT). Qualify by finishing in the top three, and you move on to the next track.

I don't think the screen resolution here is quite as high as the PlayStation version—it doesn't have that amazing hard-edged look—



SIMPLY SMASHING Destruction Derby has NASCAR Racing-style graphics, but with more emphasis on the wrecks.

course. Who can forget ROAD BLASTERS or SPY HUNTER? Driving and shooting have gone hand-in-trigger at least since Electronic Arts released RACING DESTRUCTION SET for the Commodore 64. CD ROM games like MEGARACE and CYBERRACE brought automotive violence to the big-time, and the advent of the Pentium (and the PowerMac) has primed this genre for the next level.



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S C R E A M E R



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► **GLIDE-O-RAMA** Wipeout emphasizes speed and finesse more than crashing and destroying, but the action still sucks you in

but when you get the hang of the curves well enough to stop bumping into the edges, you'll still be taken in by the bewitching smoothness of the whole affair. Never mind the fuzzy-wuzzles. This is one of the those rare games that hypnotists should use in their practice—you don't so much play as you are absorbed, mind and body into this title. Along the way, it may occasionally flicker through your mind that this is simply a game and that perhaps you should turn to more important tasks. But don't count on it.

CYBERSPEED

CyberSPEED (Mindscape) for Windows 95 is a similar sort of excursion—a dash down a long, winding bobsled trough—but more restrictive in concept and less immersive in effect. This concept owes a lot to Mindscape's earlier MEGARACE; it's set around a TV show (with a wide range of lame commercials) using 10 racetracks spread



► **BLOODY SUNDAY DRIVERS!** Although ROADWARRIOR isn't lacking on the vehicular manslaughter front, it does have a slightly different, more mission-based approach



► **PUT SOME FROG IN YOUR TANK** Hi Octane uses Bullfrog's heralded engine for attack hovercraft racing.

across the galaxy. Unfortunately, you don't really steer; your bird-like ship is on a guide wire. You control the throttle and rotation of your bird-like craft to collect power ups and keep out of the path of whatever incoming dangers your rivals throw at you.

CyberSPEED does throw in a couple of new elements, though. Most race games of this sort are one-way only. Not this one—you can turn around and head in the other direction at any time (just make sure to keep an eye on your opponents' locations so the joke's not on you). Most games in this vein are also strictly linear. Not this one—you can occasionally switch to an alternate path by tapping the "Tab" key at the appropriate time. Technically, it's reasonably well-done—the ads and silly announcer patter patch in seamlessly between the races. And on a Pentium 90, it moves along at a good clip with the detail set to medium. But CyberSPEED is ultimately more a diversion than an obsession. The level of interaction makes it more a 3-D arcade game than a true race. While Wipeout makes you feel free as a bird—you're really flying—CyberSPEED makes you feel more like an elegant pig in an elegant pen.

HI OCTANE

Hi Octane's a different matter. Constructed by Bullfrog using the MAGIC CARPET game engine, this hovercraft racing game sends you flying with tunnels, depressions, rises and the occasional surprise. The bad news is that, in SVGA, with full detail enabled, it even bogs down on a Pentium 120. So kick it down into VGA (it still looks pretty darn good), and watch Hi Octane turn into the best airborne go-kart game you've ever played.

This isn't simply MAGIC CARPET on the race track; it's a lively and lovely game all its own. There's just enough scenery to be distracting, and there's just enough give when cornering to make you watch your speed. There's also just enough extra space on the track to make you go back and explore what you may have missed. And the speed and smoothness is...well, I can't speak to frame rates. But there is something natural and comfortable about it that tells me Bullfrog is on the right track.

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ROADWARRIOR

Not all of these games are straight racers. **ROADWARRIOR**, GameTek's follow-up to **QUARANTINE**—Doom with the meter running—is mission-based. Here's the gig: Drake Edgewater has escaped from prison, only to be recaptured (stupid! Is it stupid does, sir!) and signed up for a death duel. You have to survive the arena, win the race that follows, and then make your way to Flagg City. What I saw of this preview version suggests the game will be more linear in structure than the open-ended **Quarantine**, but with the bright graphics and silly gore intact. You get to run down contestants who have been separated from their vehicles and watch them stain your windshield or, well...let's just say Drake has interesting taste in hood ornaments.

The music's great—crunching headbanging riffs while driving, and loping, lumbering jazz during the graphic-novel-inspired story sequences. And you have to admire the reckless, abandoned spirit with which it is being assembled—the title screen shows a fellow's head being reduced to red sludge, and on the configuration screen, a cat-o-nine-tails-holding dominatrix orders you to "Make a selection now!" Yes, ma'am! The only sore spot I found was the steering, which felt a little less like turning than sliding sideways. Hopefully this can be addressed before the product is finished. But it's not so big a problem that couldn't live with it. I was too busy laughing throughout.

CYBERBYKE

The only motorcycle racing game in the bunch is **CYBERBYKES SHADOW RACER VR** (also from GameTek), and I'm sorry to say it's rather woeful and dated. The scenario is a right-wing paranoid's



MOTORBIKE BOY *CyberBykes'* outdated graphics pale in comparison to the rest of the field

nightmare. One-World Rule has led to tyranny. The answer to tyranny is apparently a remote piloted, multi-weapon cycle that you use to visit key cities—Warwick? Blakdown? Tasman.a? Pride Rock?—to recover military secrets before the WTO can get their hands on 'em.



'57 CHEVY KILLER ZONE RAIDERS may be the pick of the arcade racing pack.

The packaging suggests a toney, Take 2-style game—a sort of **BUREAU 13** goes to the races—but, graphically, it turns out to be more on a level with, say, **CYBERSTRIKE**. Rendered cut scenes lead into a bland polygonal world in which a motorcycle barely looks like a motorcycle. The shame of it is that the game offers some promise—network play, headset support and a level-construction kit—that would have been crowning touches on a better-looking game. And, before you start writing "Oafson, you idiot" letters, no, graphics aren't everything, but they're the way we see a game world, and in a driving game that's a big part of the appeal.

ZONE RAIDERS

Last, but not least, is **ZONE RAIDERS** (Virgin). You're a member of a band of outcasts using a classic car cum hovercraft to explore a post-apocalyptic war zone (what'd I say about that post-apocalyptic theme?) in search of various objects, which you'll have to find, destroy or just activate. Naturally, they're defended, and you'll have to shoot it out with Zone Patrols that rule the elevated highways to get there. An auto-targeter makes this a lot easier, but you can toggle it off if you're eager to tempt fate. And an auto mapper will help you get around; after all, this isn't a track so much as a maze.

The handling is silky smooth—even in SVGA (albeit on a Pentium 120). And **ZONE RAIDERS** also throws a few neat curves at you. For one, you'll need to make certain that when you make a jump, the road doesn't change direction beneath you and leave you without a surface to land on. Up. It's a long way down in last-chance town. And speed counts. Take too long to finish a given mission and you may have to contend with a visitation from a heavily armed creaton named The Guardian. Let's not and say we did, eh? It will persuade you, in very personal and up-front fashion, that driving in the future is a blast.

continue on page 254 >>>

ORIGIN

<http://www.ea.com/origin.html>



Lapping It Up



*If You Thought INDYCAR Was Tough,
INDYCAR II Will Blow Your Racing Socks Off*

by Gordon Goble



Think back...way back. If you go far enough, you may recall when dad took the training wheels off your first bike. Remember how hard it was at first? If you're a computer racer, get ready to reive that same sort of experience, because INDYCAR RACING II is here, and it's anything but easy.

The latest release from those methanol-powered sadists at Papyrus is abundantly tougher than the original INDYCAR, and is authentic to the point of distracton. In fact, once you've played this one, you'll be able to go back to the original game and blow it away. I did, and darn if I wasn't scorning the competition like never before, even on "bull in a china shop" tracks like Surfers Paradise, Beke Isle and Vancouver's Pacific Place.

With 640x480 SVGA graphics, INDYCAR II (ICR II) is also one heck of a lot cleaner-looking than its forerunner. Despite ICR II's graphical upgrades and user-friendly additions, players will find that the alteration of the driving feel poses the biggest long term impact. The inevitable comparisons must be made, so let's explore what you can and cannot do in ICR II.

CANS AND CAN'TS

You can hit some frighteningly high speeds in very little time. Then again, so can your opponents. These speeds cause handling difficulties in spots where none had existed before. When driving an ICR II stock Ace set-up with a half-tank of fuel, I topped out at 188 mph on the Detroit back

straigh and 170 on the front, compared to 140 and 137 respectively in ICR. That's a monumental difference, and explains why tackling track segments such as the slightly kinked Long Beach front straight is a very tender subject with me these days—it's either back off, or eat wall. Yet driving with the same Ace half-tank set-up at the huge Michigan oval, the top speed differed only by a couple of miles per hour from program to program. This indicates that Papyrus tinkered with the acceleration but not the top-end capabilities.

With much diff culty, you can clock some incredibly fast lap times (especially on road courses), and those times are now displayed right on the instrument panel.

Unlike ICR, you can't cut corners and magically adhere to the road surface. I can hear you saying, "Get a grip, INDYCAR was never very easy." While I understand your sentiments, you



► LOOK, MA Don't be distracted by your pretty car on the Jumbotron or chaos may ensue.

Price: \$55

System Requirements:
IBM compatible 486DX-33 or better (486DX2-66 for SVGA), 8MB RAM, VGA or SVGA graphics, 12 MB hard drive space, 2x CD-ROM, joystick/driving wheel and sound card recommended

Protection: None
Designers: Adam Levesque, Brian C. Mahony, Matt Sentell
Publisher: Papyrus Watertown, MA (617) 926-7575

Reader Service: #344

Right Side

► **IN WHEEL TROUBLE** Little more than a cockpit remains as your car slows to a halt after a near-deadly crash.

just a n't seen nothing yet. A reasonably hot ICR II set-up will be slippery and truly scary—which lends a realistic impression that power is being delivered through the rear tires. Milwaukee, for instance, is no longer a matter of keeping a consistent speed. There'll be acceleration, deceleration, and great care in the turns. There's a lot of NASCAR Racing style modeling here in the mechanics of how a real race car operates, including, unfortunately, tires that refuse to heat up as quickly as those on the computer cars.

Joystick drivers can't reasonably expect to piece together dozens of clean laps on any road course, in particular those hemmed in with concrete. Wheeled wimps driving indestructible cars (or the new "arcade damage" and "auto spin recovery" models) can ignore this section, but the rest of us real drivers must remember: four appendages do better work than one. Drivers insisting on maximum realism will also want to activate the "random mechanical breakdown" feature for the absolute maximum of frustration.



► **CHAOS ENSUES** IndyCar II sports spectacular crashes—if you're not careful, your driver may lose his head.

VIEW TO A CRASH

So, now that we've got that straight, let's get into all the other stuff. Aside from car modeling, Papyrus' NASCAR Racing influences ICR II in a number of other areas. ICR II features an F10 arcade car view (now you'll have immediate proof why that corner can't be taken at 80 mph), a preset qualifying set-up, and a much needed pit radio. It also has a replay cut editor, an indexed manual (yipee!), and the sounds of an air wrench and a smack on the shell as the crew signals "go" in the pits. It is important to note that the crew won't actually be saying go, and that the engine automatically shuts down with even moderate wheel damage—extra incentive to take care out there.

Another welcome NASCAR holdover in ICR II, the "car sideways in the rear view mirror" routine, aids in determining enemy proximity. However, cars may sometimes appear in the

mirrors that aren't really there. I've often trailed a string of cars entering a tight corner, only to see a reflection of those very same machines in the rear view.

Then there's those darn collisions. What was pretty cool in NASCAR is stupendous now. That's right, driving deviants, Indycars crash better than ever! Sure, various chunks break off the

car a la NASCAR, but now the most severe incidents can end in wheel-less, engine-less, chassis-deprived safety tubs grinding and sparking their way along the track.

The worst crashes even cause the driver's helmet disappear from the screen. Unfortunately for fans of pure violence, such accidents have to be lined up just so, because these guys, for the most part, do have a head on their shoulders.

DRIVER'S ED

Indeed, Papyrus AI has taken a big step forward in ICR II. With this release, drivers are just intelligent enough to realize the human element may exhibit all too human frailties. Once I came a bit too hot out of Michigan's Turn One. There I was, just a' steaming toward the wall—and more importantly, toward the line of cars attached to it. I managed to slow up just enough



► **TRACK PACK** IndyCar II maintains a good frame rate even with multiple detailed cars on the screen.

to miss the evil trackside barrier, yet certainly figured I'd be bonding with a few of my peers.

Suddenly, like the Red Sea, they parted company just enough to let me in. This sort of AI shows up all over the place, such as Laguna Seca's corkscrew where a timid early braking maneuver doesn't necessarily mean rear wing separation at the hands of a charging driver. You may experience the odd tap (can you say Detroit?), but no damage.

Sadly, Papyrus wasn't able to deal with the problem of computer cars coming to a dead stop when a vehicle is slow or stopped on the driving line. Here, the other drivers remain

An Indy Primer

If your previous PC racing experience has been limited to arcade-type games, don't be surprised if your first few *IndyCar II* forays are accompanied with sentiments such as, "Why did I buy this game?", "Nobody can drive this thing!" and the ever popular, "\$%#*!." If you ride out the initial storm, however, it will get better.

First-timers would do well to customize some options before they even get near a track. From the Main Menu, choose the wide and somewhat forgiving Michigan oval to cut your racing teeth. Go to the garage and load the Easy set-up. Before driving, knock the fuel load down to a half-tank (20 gallons), so you won't have to worry about large amounts of methanol negative impacting car handling.

Behind the wheel there are three golden words that must be committed to memory: Patience, Smoothness and Consistency. Remember, there will always be another time to pass a given vehicle, so don't attempt wild maneuvers that could end up in a clock-eating bobble or spin.

Driving fast down the straightaways will be the least of your problems. Dealing with turns is tough. Enter a turn from the outside (up near the wall), cut down to the inside, and slow down. Try clipping the apex before accelerating through the exit. Using

this technique, you will naturally swing back to the outside wall at full acceleration. Traffic and other considerations won't allow a textbook turn each and every time, but stay as close to this philosophy as possible. Remember that you're in control of a constantly changing machine, and things like a depleting fuel load and warming tires will get you moving faster and adhering better as the race progresses.

Passing is something else altogether. Mastery of the "draft" or "slipstream" greatly enhances the straightaway pass. Many high brow scientific principles take place here, but it goes like this: If two cars, lined up one behind the other, are traveling approximately the same speed, the front car will be "cutting the air" for the one tucked behind. The narrower the gap, the greater the effects of the vacuum. So, if you start several car lengths behind, you will begin moving faster and faster until you're on the lead car's back wing. Just before you rear-end him pull out to the inside and your momentum will carry you safely by. Works every time.

Passing in a turn, on the other hand, generally involves a little maneuver called "out-braking." In essence, you want to make the pass before you slow for the corner, and the only way to do that is to brake later than your rival. Make sure you are on the inside line as the two of you go into the turn, then wait. When his image drops back in the rear-view mirror, apply the binders. If you do this just right, he'll have to fall in behind you (watch a replay b&w view to see why). Never pass on the outside, particularly in a turn.

Those are the basics. Welcome to the "real" world of *IndyCar II*.



► **SHOW STOPPER** When you see this conflagration in front of you, there's nothing to do but close your eyes and duck.

Incredibly stupid. Remember, if you crash, come to a stop right on the traversed area, and nobody's gonna finish the race.

SHARP EDGES

Graphically, *ICR II* comes through with flying high res colors. Sparkling, sharp, clear—pick a superlative and it applies to everything on and off the track, including transparent windshields. (even though curbing is conspicuously absent.) Of course, such was the case with *NASCAR*, but the much-heralded frame-rate fiasco muted the enthusiasm of anyone operating on less than a Pentium 100. Fortunately, in a stunning stroke of programming smarts, Papyrus deals a blow to the god of slow frame rates with *ICR II*.

Running a Pentium 90 with a Diamond Stealth 64 VRAM, I set maximum cars drawn in front and behind, with all sounds on. Flagrantly flinging disappointment, I bravely cranked all graphic options wide open, only to discover a smooth frame rate. In the end, I killed the grass and road texture, and the darned thing flowed like honey from corner to corner, side to side.

Regrettably, I'd remained riveted on the program's visual bountifully a little too long, and suddenly found myself involved in the most embarrassing of on-track incidents. Yes, this time I'd pounded the pace car, and darned if that driver didn't have something to say back to me!

Well, have patience with me, buddy. After all, I don't have my training wheels any longer.

► **APPEAL:** Hard-core racing fans who want complete control in and out of the pits, or wannabe fast drivers who don't mind learning the ropes.

► **PROS:** Crisp graphics with a better frame rate than *NASCAR Racing*, as well as cataclysmic collisions. Major improvements to opponent AI and car handling from the original *IndyCar*.

► **CONS:** Road courses are nearly impossible without a wheel-and-pedal controller unit. Increased authenticity and difficulty may frustrate rookies. Is it too real?

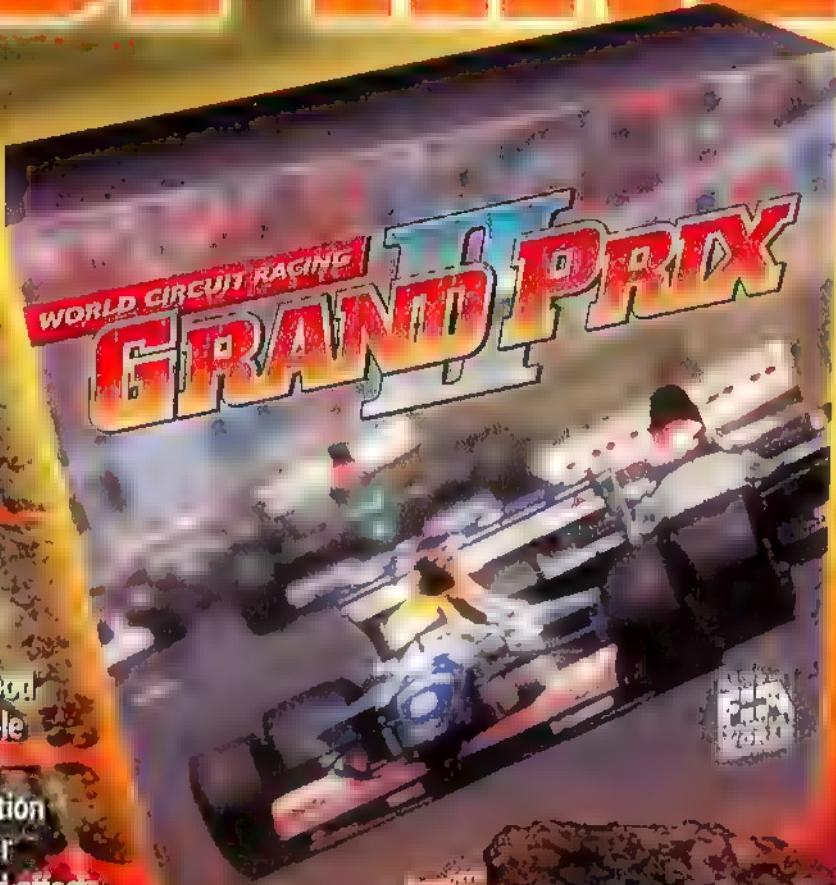


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YOU'RE NEXT

Metro Times

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2050

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DAILY 50¢

DESIGNATED AREAS HIGHER



"The Bullet" McCree meets his untimely demise.

Bicycle
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now legendary Main St. incident. On May 26, Suzie the Bicycle Babe skidded out near the fire hydrant on Derby and Main, slipped, and landed face-down on a vomit-covered manhole. As if on cue, the manhole slid open and a pack of Sewer Rats hauled Suzie off for a leisurely mid-afternoon snack.

The Architect Guild, in a last-ditch effort to save the city's landmark structures from the crippling excesses of the Dog Boys and Crap Pukes, have pledged their support to the Bicycle Messenger's effort.

Please see MESSENGER, A17

Cashco Inc. Rejects Homeless Funding

By Smith, reporter
in the
sun
after

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Acid Attack Burns Overlord To A Crisp

Chaos in city-wide gang warfare heats up with acid-blasting of Frank "The Bullet" McCree, the city's most notorious Overlord in the Northside. Responsibility for yesterday's assault remains a mystery.

By Zippy Smith, TIMES STAFF WRITER

Chaos reigns today in the Northwest District as kingpin Frank "The Bullet" McCree fell victim to a vicious and grisly acid blade bludgeoning.

His body, horribly disfigured by the noxious weapon, was discovered stapled to a street sign at 10:15 pm last night by a roving band of Headbangers on their way to break up the annual Disco Freak Ball at the County Museum.

"This hot and skanky stuff was dripping off my skull, so I looked up and there he was," stated the Headbanger who found McCree. "He looked like something that came out my butt," he further reflected. Other Headbangers who were present verified this assessment.

Experts at the scene say it looked like the work of the 7th Ave. Metal Burn Mutant Pack. But a letter pinned by a wad of gum to McCree's melted nose claims responsibility for the Happy Camper Gang in the name of their current employer, Billy "The Spike" Hernandez.

Whoever it was, they had no problem disposing of McCree's favorite hired guns, the brutal Monks of the Emerald Order. According to the Banker's Guild, sacred ritual objects from the now-defunct Order have fallen into the hands of a Used Car Salesman and are expected to fetch six figures on the black market. The Used Car Salesman was unavailable for comment but through his Paceman, disavowed any involvement in McCree's murder.

According to sources close to the grieving family, McCree was wearing his custom fitted Kevlar Vest at the time of the attack, but it "had as much the same effect as soft butter resisting a butcher's knife," said one family member.

Key witness to the crime made this statement: "All I saw was two people look will each other and then one of them just exploded."

CHAOSES OVERLORDS



Headbanger who found McCree.

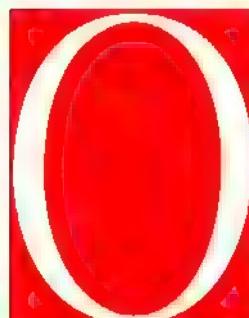
City Headed For Apocalypse Doomsday Cult Proclaims "The End Is Near"

By Silv White, TIMES STAFF WRITER

In a direct assault on the beliefs of the "Followers of Sappho," Doomsday

The Need For Speed

Why SCSI Is Not A Four-Letter Word



One of the rudest sounding acronyms in the computer biz is SCSI. SCSI stands for Small Computer Systems Interface, and has been common in the UNIX workstation, PC server, Mac, and Amiga worlds. Most desktop PCs don't use SCSI unless they have a scanner or similar device attached. One reason that SCSI isn't more popular is the added cost: SCSI hard disks cost a bit more than their EIDE counterparts. The price differential between SCSI CD-ROM drives and EIDE CD-ROM drives is even greater.

The other reason that SCSI isn't more popular is the confusion that surrounds the various flavors of SCSI. As recently as a couple of years ago, you couldn't be sure that a SCSI device moved from one

system to a different one would work properly. Things are a lot better now, but there are still the occasional quirks. For example, if you formatted a large SCSI hard disk using one brand of SCSI host adapter (say, Buslogic), then it couldn't be read properly using a different brand of host adapter (say, Adaptec). The reason for this is that DOS and the PC's ROM BIOS don't handle large disk partitions well, so the SCSI controller manufacturers have to fill in the gap; they all do it a bit differently. (Similar problems existed between various software disk managers in the IDE world until the advent of the EIDE standard and the widespread use of Logical Block Addressing for IDE controllers.)

Then there are the various flavors of SCSI: SCSI-I, SCSI-II, SCSI-III, fast SCSI, wide SCSI, differential SCSI, ultra SCSI. It's enough to make your head spin.

HARD DRIVE ENLARGEMENT

However, there are reasons to use SCSI. The most important reason is that it will have a bigger internal cache (a 32K Level 1 cache) and some multimedia acceleration features. There's also some conjecture that Intel will build in PCI support directly, making the P55 cheaper to implement. The P55 will likely run at 150 MHz and above. The high clock rate, combined with the large internal cache and potential multimedia acceleration, will make this a very nice chip for computer gaming.

►Sometime in 1996, Intel will be shipping a new version of the Pentium chip, the P55. Since the Pentium Pro (formerly the P6) will likely be restricted to very high-end systems for some time, the Pentium family needed a kicker. In fact, springing for a P6 system might not result in much of a performance gain for today's games, since the P6 is tuned for 32-bit applications.

►Rumors have been flying about the P55 feature set. What is



SCSI. The aforementioned large hard disks are a good example. Even now, the largest EIDE hard drives are 1.6 gigabytes, with 2 gigabyte drives yet to hit the streets, but you can get SCSI hard drives as large as 9 gigabytes.

The other advantage is device variety. On one SCSI interface, you can have up to seven devices, including CD-ROM drives, hard disks, tape drives and scanners. This can be very valuable in the PC architecture, with its limited number of hardware interrupts. For example, the Adaptec 3940 twin-channel SCSI interface can support up to 15 devices, using only a single interrupt (IRQ). Contrast this with systems which support four IDE devices. Each pair of IDE devices uses an interrupt, so if you have four peripherals attached, you use up two interrupts. Anyone who's tried to configure scanner cards, network cards, and a flurry of other oddball devices can testify to the hair-pulling that goes on in the eternal hunt for a free interrupt in a full PC.

Then there's the performance issue. In systems with a single hard disk, EIDE drives often outperform their SCSI cousins, even if the same core disk drive mechanism is used. As soon as you go to multiple drives, things begin to change. This is because of the way IDE is implemented.

“One of the best CD-ROM performance kickers is to convert from an IDE CD-ROM drive to SCSI.”

When the PC sends a request to the IDE drive for some data, it waits until the IDE drive says it's ready. With SCSI, the PC sends the request, then immediately goes on and does something else, assuming the SCSI drive will do its thing.

With IDE hard drives, this slight wait is imperceptible, and often hidden by the fast data rates and access times of modern EIDE disks. However, it becomes quite noticeable in CD-ROM drives, which have slower data rates and slower access times.

This has nothing to do with transfer rates or access times. The secret to why SCSI CD-ROM drives will always outperform their IDE cousins is CPU utilization.

When the computer sends a request for a data transfer to the IDE device, it waits until the device says it's ready.

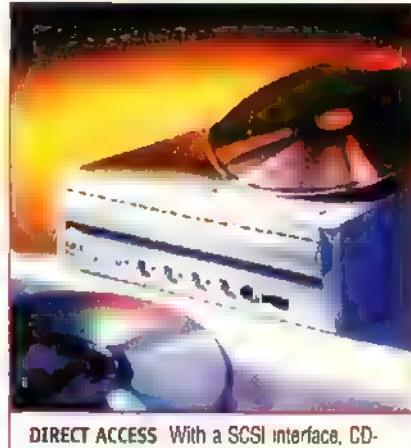
flying back and forth, the CPU has to work much harder. In contrast, with a SCSI CD-ROM drive and its intelligent controller, the computer simply issues the request and continues on to the next task.

Even with very fast IDE CD-ROM drives (6x and faster), digital video cut scenes from some games occasionally stutter in the middle of a game—even on a 133-MHz Pentium. I however, I've seen very little stutter with even quad-speed SCSI CDs. And remember that every nanosecond the CPU is working on the CD-ROM drive is another nanosecond that's not being dedicated to processing whatever is going on in your game. One of the best CD-ROM performance kickers is to convert from an IDE CD-ROM drive to SCSI.

RIDE THE LOCAL BUS

SCSI can be darned confusing. However, if all you're interested in is CD-ROM performance, you only need to find a good, reliable SCSI-II controller. These are available from a variety of vendors, including Adaptec, DPT, Buslogic and others. If you're picking an ISA controller, definitely get a 16-bit controller. However, if you can afford it, get a local bus controller (VLB or PCI, depending on your system.) They are far easier to configure

than their ISA cousins. And with a local bus SCSI controller, you can begin to think about those very large hard disks ...



DIRECT ACCESS With a SCSI interface, CD-ROM drives such as this NEC MultiSpin 4x4 can transfer data with almost no CPU overhead

Finally, for those of you who are interested in SCSI hard drives, and are confused by the variety, here's a table of the common and emerging formats. Note that the data rates are the maximum possible speeds on the bus, and that ultra SCSI hard drives won't really be shipping in quantity until mid-1996. Also, wide SCSI drives (which transfer data in 16-bit chunks rather than the 8-bit chunks of standard SCSI) are pricier.

In truth, it's probably not worth hunting down an ultra wide SCSI drive if all you're doing is running games and using a single hard disk. The disk drives themselves can only transfer data so fast; ultra wide drives really come into their own for disk arrays on servers.



CHAIN LINK

Each SCSI interface board allows chaining up to seven devices, which can be a major boon if your machine is short on free IRQ addresses.

Because CD-ROM drives are inherently much slower than hard drives, this wait is a bit longer. If lots of requests for data are

CTIPS!

► Can't get your joystick to work properly under Win 95 with a dedicated joystick card? There have been conflicts between these cards and sound card joystick ports. Go into the device manager

remove the sound card drivers and joystick drivers, then reinstall the Win 95 joystick driver. The joystick driver should find the dedicated controller card, since you've removed the sound card driver. When you restart Win 95, it'll find the sound card and reinstall its drivers.

► Once you get your Win 95 system

SCSI Type	Maximum Data Rate
Fast SCSI (SCSI-II)	10 megabytes per second
Fast, Wide SCSI	20 megabytes per second
Ultra SCSI (8-bit)	20 megabytes per second
Ultra Wide SCSI (16-bit)	40 megabytes per second

tweaked, export your registry files. This is a way of backing up the hidden files that keep track of the hardware and software you've installed. Use the Start button's Run command to launch RegEdit, pull down the registry menu and select Export Registry. This will save many hours of restoring software if you ever need to reinstall Win 95.

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{Talk}

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I D C % R E A L F U N

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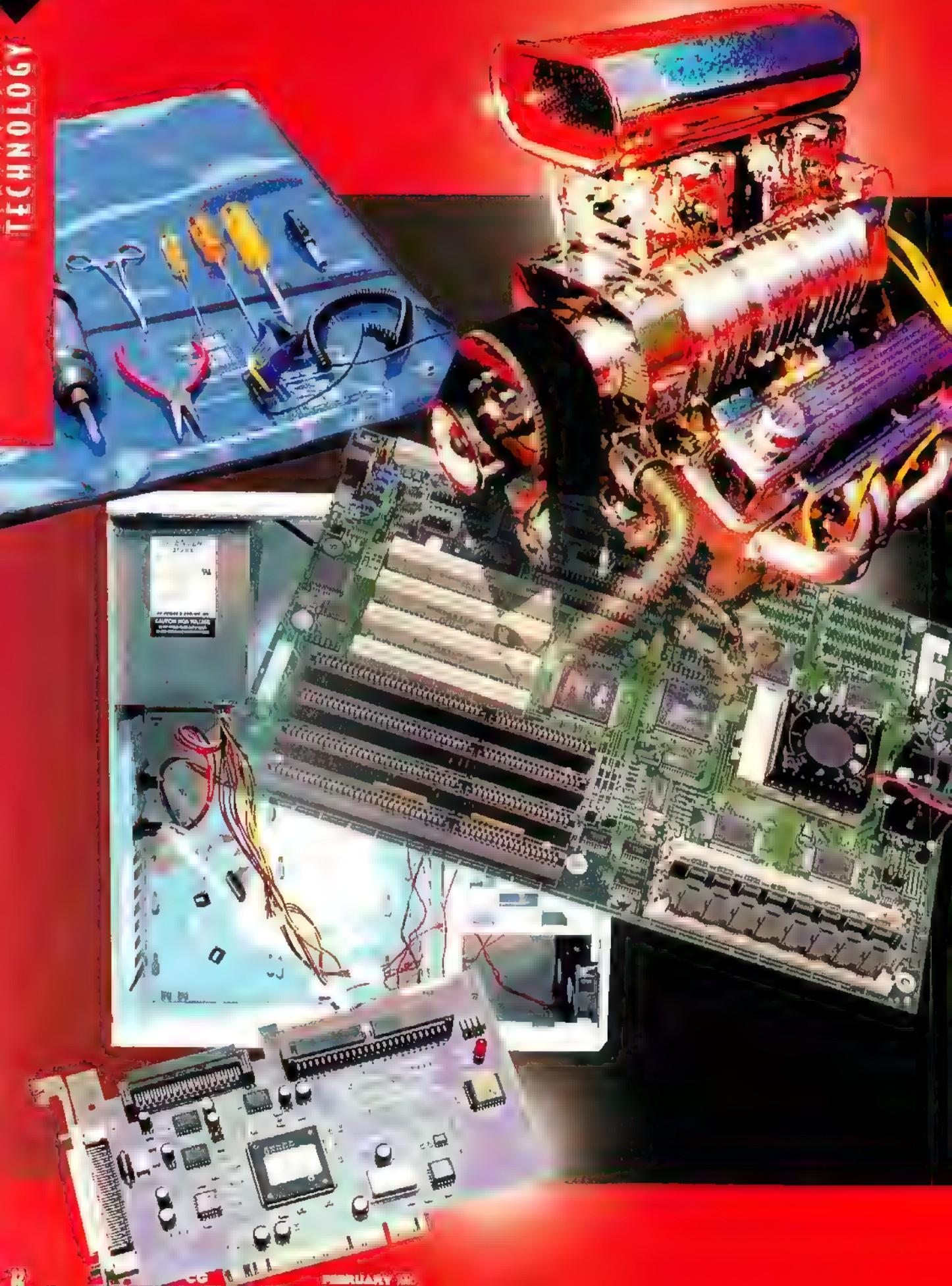


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The Ultimate Game Machine

*Building The Electronic Hot Rod
From The Chassis Up*

Lloyd Case

There is a group in Southern California known as the Banzai Runners. They drive custom cars with exotic hardware such as twin-turbocharged Chrysler boat engines, aircraft alloy frames, and tires not seen this side of the Bonneville salt flats. They delight in finding unsuspecting rich kids in Porsches and Ferraris and blowing them away on dark highways. Some of these cars (using the word loosely) can run upwards of 240 miles per hour.

Building the ultimate hot-rod game rig is not unlike being a Banzai runner. It's the quintessential quest for perfection—which, like any holy quest, never really ends.

In the past two issues, I've covered general upgrade strategies and some high-end, off-the-shelf systems. Now we'll proceed to the holy grail: the Banzai Runner of personal computers.

CAVEATS

Building a custom computer is as much an exercise in personal bias and taste as it is in technical merits. It's like building your own NASCAR—everyone in the business has their own opinion as to the best motor, body, tires and accessories. So as you read this, bear in mind that it reflects some of my biases and tastes. If you take up the mission of building your own custom rig, you may have your own favorite set of components.

The other important caveat is that this article was written right on the cusp of

some important hardware releases. For example, the 150- and 166-MHz Pentiums were only a couple of weeks from shipping, so we had to go with a 133-MHz chip instead. Also, a new generation of graphics adapters are being prepped for delivery by Spring of 1996, so we again had to "settle" for what currently exists.

THE ENGINE

There are a variety of parts that comprise the engine of our virtual hot-rod. Starting with an Intel 133-MHz Pentium, we chose the

Micromat M54-II motherboard as our "engine mount." This motherboard is fairly typical of most boards out there, so take a look at specific features you might need before you decide. The M54-II has seven usable slots (either four PCI and three ISA, or vice-versa, as one pair of slots is inline), and it uses the Intel Triton PCI chipset, which is the current hot PC chipset right now. (Like many of our choices for this version of the

new chipsets on the verge of hitting the street, including Intel's own Triton II chipset.) The board comes with 256K of synchronous cache soldered onto the motherboard; you can increase that to 512K for a minor performance boost.

The Micromat board also has onboard PCI Enhanced IDE, two serial ports and one parallel port. The only down side to this board is the use of the rather inflexible Phoenix BIOS, but we ran into no real problems with configuration.

Micromat has been in the mother-

COMPUTER GAMING'S ULTIMATE GAME MACHINE



PART THREE • THE ULTIMATE GAMING MACHINE

board business for nearly a decade, and it shows. The M5-HI looks like a clean design, is well laid-out, and allows for up to two full-size interface cards. The board

Some Assembly Required

Listing all the parts like this makes it sound like a pretty cool system—until you have a garage full of boxes, a lot of seemingly incomplete manuals and not much time on your hands. Although it's much easier than it was a few years ago, building your own computer is still not a task for the technologically faint-of-heart. This is especially true if you're trying to build on the "bleeding edge".

However, if you're still tempted, here's some advice. First, heed all the warnings you may have heard about static electricity, particularly if you live in a dry climate. One ungrounded shuffle across a carpet, and that Pentium processor that set you back \$800 is now a piece of scrap silicon. Although it's possible to exercise caution by simply touching the power supply or other ground periodically as you're working, a better solution is to invest \$20 in a grounding strap. These are available at most electronic hobbyist stores.

There are also several incredibly useful tools: an electric screwdriver, a set of spring tongs (for retrieving those dropped screws) and a pair of forceps, which are ideal for inserting jumpers in awkward places. And whatever you do, don't forget to pick up a set of those cute plastic standoffs that are absolutely essential for mounting your new motherboard in its case.

While the 10-bay tower case I used is overkill for most systems, do try to get a full-sized tower, if possible. At least get a midsize tower or full-size desktop—avoid a minitower at all costs. Your knuckles will thank you for it.

How did CG's hot-rod go together? I've built and upgraded a number of systems over the years, so it went fairly smoothly. However, I had odd, unexpected problems. For example, the ten-bay case was built to better tolerances than most cases I've seen, which meant that the metal slot cover on some I/O cards fit very snugly.

Also, working with the new generation of plug-and-play devices proved somewhat daunting. Configuring plug-and-play cards should be an oxymoron, since they are self-configuring. Problems occur when the system picks a set of parameters for a card (e.g., the AWE-32) that isn't consistent with what many games expect.

Part of the problem stems once again from being "between generations." When Win 95 native mode games become the norm—probably not for another year—then DOS configuration hassles will become an unpleasant memory. Until then, plug-and-play can be frustrating. Poor documentation didn't help, either. To properly configure the AWE PnP in a DOS environment, you need to load a software driver, which isn't really documented anywhere. Only by pawing through the AWE package, did I find the Intel Plug and Play ISA Configuration Utility disk.

On a more mundane note, lifting a 21-inch monitor was quite a challenge, and those of you without bulging muscles should ask for assistance. The all-steel tower case was no lightweight, either.

is quite rigid, unlike some less-expensive boards, and installing into the tower case was a snap.

The machine was configured with 16 MB of 60-nanosecond EDO RAM, direct from chip manufacturer Micron.

THE WHEELS

No computer is complete without storage. Skipping IDE and EIDE (enhanced IDE) disks entirely, as they require processor power to transfer data, I went with the Adaptec 2940UW ultra-wide SCSI drive. The 2940UW is capable of burst data rates of up to 40 MB per second using ultra-wide SCSI drives (see my column in this issue for more info on SCSI). Unfortunately, Ultra SCSI drives aren't very common yet, so we obtained a Quantum Atlas 2.1 gigabyte wide SCSI drive. This drive transfers data in 16-bit chunks (rather than the usual eight bits for standard SCSI) and can handle burst transfers of up to 20 MB per second. With an access time of 8.5 milliseconds, a 1 MB buffer and a rotation speed of 7200 RPM, this drive is about as fast as you can get.



IG Power & Cooling 10-Bay Case With Silentec 210 Power Supply

As for the floppy, I went a little exotic here, picking Combyte's double speed floppy/QIC tape drive combo unit. This is a nice little unit that works as advertised, and with 2.1 GB of storage in our hot-rod system, a few 800 MB QIC tape cartridges supply ready backup capability.

WINDOWS ON THE WORLD

Of course, the operating system is Windows 95, which can run the newest Win 95-native games and handle DOS games with panache. In the worst case,

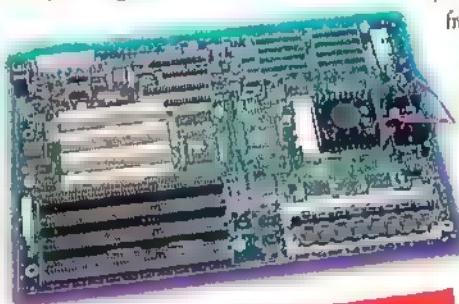
you can always run your games from the DOS prompt.

The Matrox Millennium handled the graphics chores. Unlike earlier Matrox cards, it's a very solid DOS performer; it also offers stellar Win 95 performance. The Millennium is expandable to 8 MB of WRAM (a new kind of memory optimized for graphics adapters) and has expansion connectors for video-capture and MPRG daughterboards.

I've been using the Millennium for several months now, and have been impressed by its overall speed and rock-solid Windows performance.

My choice of the Millennium, however, was because none of the neat new stuff was on the verge of shipping. We've been a bit disappointed with the Diamond Edge, but we're looking forward to cards based on Rendition's Vérité 3-D chip and S3's Verge 3-D accelerator. Those won't be out for several months yet, though.

Ah, yes, the monitor. I couldn't settle



Micronics M5-HI Motherboard

The choice of CD-ROM was somewhat conservative, but still pretty quick: NEC's 6X CD-ROM reader. The 6X sports an access time of 145 milliseconds. It handles digital video better than even an 8X EIDE CD-ROM, due to the fact that SCSI transfers don't incur the huge processor penalty EIDE accesses do. The NEC's front panel is slicker than most as well, with a backlit LCD display, a volume control for the headphone jack and one-handed operation. It does, however, require a caddy.

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PART THREE • THE ULTIMATE GAMING MACHINE



Adaptec Ultra-Wide SCSI Adapter

for a measly 17-inch. Instead, I went whole-hog and used an NEC XE21 21-inch mon-

ster. This massive vacuum-tube-and-plastic sculpture adds tremendously to the gaming experience, especially with SVGA games. With a high refresh rate, it ran Win 95 at 1280 x 1024 very comfortably.

Of course, there may be times when you want to be more immersed in a game world than even a 21-inch monitor can offer. For those times, I chose the Forte VFX-1 virtual reality helmet.

MechWarrior 2 is a real experience with

the VFX-1; just look at your target and pull the trigger. Many of the new action and sim games support the VFX-1. Despite its low resolution, there are times when you just have to get into a different reality.

THE ROAR OF THE CROWD

Good audio is as essential as good graphics to any modern computer game. I wanted to be conservative for compatibility purposes, yet push the edge in terms of both digital audio and MIDI music quality. I picked the Creative Labs AWE-32 plug-and-play card, mostly for its clean digital audio section. The AWE-32 has a connector for a wavetable daughterboard, so for convenience as well as sound quality, I installed a Roland SCD-15 Sound Canvas daughterboard. I was tempted to use either a Roland SC-55 external Sound Canvas module or the new Yamaha MU-SS,

but chose the daughterboard for ease of configuration.

For that additional "oomph," the NuReality Vivid3D Pro SRS sound module was added in-line to the audio. SRS is one of several techniques for simulating 3-D "surround" sound from standard stereo speakers. The effect can be quite startling; more than once, I've turned around to see what monster was behind me in a gaming session.

Since the choice of MIDI module was on the conservative side, I went all-out on speakers and amplifiers. Although I was tempted by the new Altec Lansing ACS-500 Dolby Pro Logic multimedia speakers, I went all-out, running the audio from the sound card through a Technics SA-CX490 Dolby Pro Logic AV receiver, which can generate 80 watts per channel for normal two-channel stereo. For speakers I went with a Cambridge Soundworks Ensemble III subwoofer/satellite trio. The sound level that this combination can generate is staggering, at least compared to even the best "multimedia" speakers.

Then there are those times when you really have to feel the sound effects in your bones. After all, there's a difference between hearing an autocannon hit in MechWarrior 2 and feeling the hit. While most of us don't have room for exotic devices like the Thundercat, there's a weird gauge from Aura Systems called the Interactor Cushion. It's basically a set of low-range speakers in a backrest. You attach the Interactor to your sound card

(Aura supplies a mini-DIN splitter, so you can still have sound out of your speakers as well).

FUEL AND NITRO

No computer would be complete without power, of course, and a little overkill was in order.

However, I wanted no ordinary power supply—or case, for that matter. The best power supplies I've found are from PC Power and Cooling.

The Silencer 270 is a good unit that combines quiet operation

(hence the name) with rock-solid power stability. To back it up, I added the APS 480 uninterruptable power supply.

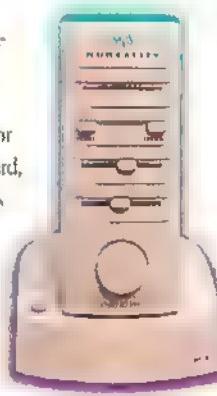
PC Power and Cooling also supplied the little cooling fan for the Pentium Processor. Unlike cheap cooling fans, the PCCooler is a low-profile fan with a 50,000 mean time between failures.

Of course, no hot-rodded computer would be complete without the ultimate case. Going for the macho, massive look rather than elegant curves, PC Power and Cooling also supplied the case. This monster case has ten bays for expansion; when open, the entire motherboard is accessible, without any obstruction. The whole shebang was made of heavy gauge sheet metal—even the little decorative covers that go over the drive bays. This is not a case for the faint-hearted, and is probably too deep for many home offices. But even when the next generation of processors ships, you can always tell people you have the biggest personal computer on your block.

The Price of Perfection

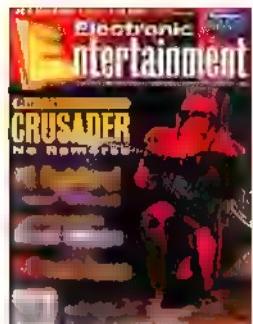
(Approximate street prices)

Micronics M54HI Motherboard	\$375
Matrox Millenium Graphics Card	\$450
16 MB EDO RAM	\$600
133 MHz Pentium	\$550
Quantum Atlas 2.1 GB Wide SCSI	\$780
PC Power & Cooling Silencer 270	\$159
PC Power & Cooling 10-bay case	\$270
PC Power & Cooling Chip Fan	\$20
Adaptec Ultra-Wide SCSI Adapter	\$300
NEC 6Xi CD-ROM Drive	\$450
NEC XE21 Monitor	\$1,700
Sound Blaster AWE32 PnP	\$250
Roland SCD-15 MIDI daughtercard	\$200
Combyte floppy/tape combo	\$175
Northgate Omnikey 101 keyboard	\$70
Logitech Mouseman Seisa	\$55
CH F16 Combat Stick	\$70
CH Pro Throttle	\$130
CH Pro Pedals	\$85
CH Virtual Pilot Pro	\$85
CH Gamecard III	\$30
Gravis Gamepad	\$35
Microsoft Sidewinder 3D Pro	\$69
USR DSVD 28.8 Modem	\$250
Ethercard III PCI	\$130
Windows 95 full version	\$180
QEMM 4.0	\$65
Technics SA-GX490 AV Receiver	\$280
Cambridge Soundworks Ensemble III	\$330
Aura Interactor Virtual Pad	\$75
Forte VFX-1 Helmet	\$999
Joystick	\$20
NuReality Vivid 3D Pro SRS module	\$80
APS 480 Uninterruptible Power System	\$180
Total:	\$9,497



NuReality Vivid 3D Pro SRS Module

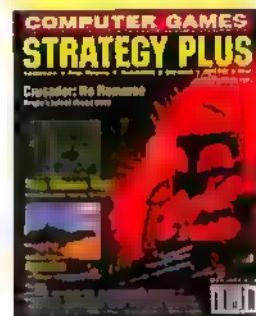
THE CRITICS ARE RAVING ...



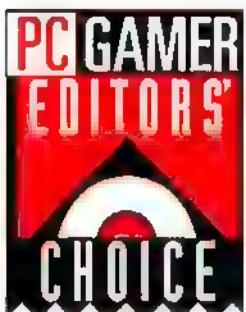
Electronic Entertainment
December '95

"Crusader: No Remorse plays great and looks even better. It's our game of the month. Game play — 5 stars."

"Crusader's one of the best action games out there ..."



Strategy Plus
November '95



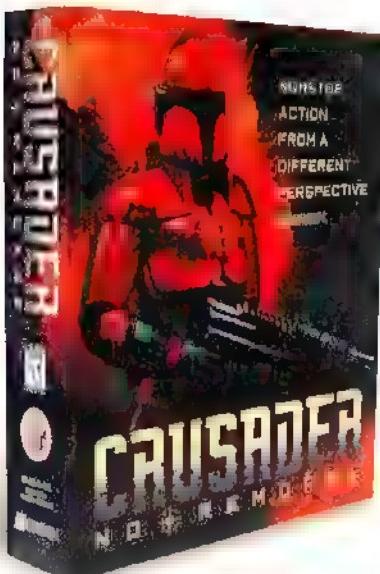
PCGamer
December '95

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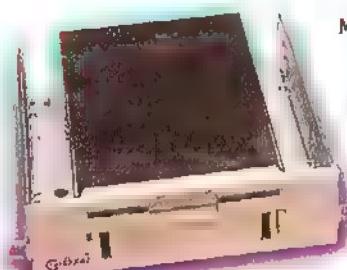
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• Complete Floppy/Tape Combo

No game system is complete without a set of controllers. First the mundane: you gotta type and you gotta mouse around. My keyboard of choice has always been the Northgate Omakay 101. No other keyboard manufacturer has come close to the feel of the Omakay line. They're a little hard to find, but well worth the effort spent looking. Although I took a close look at the Microsoft Natural keyboard, I found pressing the keys down took too much work, despite the more relaxed layout.

Imagine a mouse with a rubberized surface rather than a slippery one, and you've just imagined the Logitech Sensa. The Sensa comes in several colors and

MAKING IT FLY

patterns; two of them have a rubberized surface that feels natural to the hand. The action is smooth and silky.

Now for the controllers. I've always been something of a flight sim fan, though not quite a true fanatic. Nonetheless, it was a difficult choice between the hyper-realistic Thrustmaster F-1CS/TQS joystick/throttle combination and the new F-16 Combat Stick/Pro Throttle upstarts from the venerable CH Products. In the end, I found myself surprised to give the nod to the CH controllers. The Pro throttle, in particular, had a much smoother feel than the TQS, and was much easier to adjust in small increments. I also found myself liking the CH Pro Pedals better than my personal set of Thrustmaster RCS pedals. These new con-

trollers constitute quite a comeback for CH, in my book. The Pro Pedals can also do double duty in driving simulations.

Rounding out the controllers, the CH Virtual Pilot Pro is a very nice yoke-and-throttle setup that can also be used, albeit not quite realistically, in driving sims.

Still, flight sim-oriented joysticks aren't necessarily the best sticks for action games, so I used the solid Gravis Gamepad for fighting games and the new Microsoft Sidewinder 3D Pro for other action-oriented games. One last-minute addition we set up with the ultimate rig was the VVJD Virtual Vehicle driving device from Interactive DC.

Although we didn't include it in the total cost of our system, this \$1295 controller/cockpit should be on your list if you're a really big fan of NASCAR Racing or IndyCar II.



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IS SOMETIMES ACTION TOO.



All these controllers have a lot of cables. Life is made much easier with a Joystick, a \$20 box that hooks up four controllers and two foot controllers.

Rounding the system out is the new US Robotics DSX 1D modem. This modem allows simultaneous voice and data over a single phone line, which makes modem gaming much more fun. A 3COM Etherlink PCI LAN card is the final device, for multiplayer games.

THE HOLY GRAIL

Is the ultimate hot-rod worth it? As configured, CG's ultimate game rig will cost you nearly \$9,500 (see table). When you compare it to last month's best off-the-shelf system, the Falcon Northwest Mach V, that seems like a steep price to pay. In terms of overall performance, our machine is faster, but this is mostly due to the combination of the Millennium graphics card and the Quantum wide SCSI

hard disk. In fact, the CPU benchmarks are ever-so-slightly slower. The overall DOSMark is among the highest I've seen, however, which is also attributable to the Matrox card and the Quantum disk.

Of course, you could always start with an off-the-shelf system and evolve it into your own dream machine. But remember that building your own Banzai Runner means starting off on a never-ending quest for perfection. **S**

CG Ultimate Game Machine

Benchmark	Test	CG Ultimate Game Machine	Gateway P5-133 XL	Falcon Northwest 133MHz Mach V
Winbench96	Graphmark: 1024x768, 8bit	27	24.2	21.8
Winbencl 96	Graphmark: 640x480x768, 16bit	22	21.7	18.1
Winbench96	CD mlx	n/a	501	549
Winbench96	Disk Wmark	1160	1000	1020
Winbench96	CPU 16	275	268	287
Winbench96	CPU 32	270	270	291
PCbench 9.0	DOSmark	1448	1333	1342
PCbench 9.0	Video mlx (graphics)	6550	6375	4695
3D Bench	3D Bench	125	125	125

Higher numbers indicate better performance. For a description of these benchmarks, see the January issue.

Don't be fortune's fool.

It is wise to contemplate these generous words. Qin, the fire Emperor of China has spoken. Return to the Middle Kingdom explore and discover the perilous mysteries of Qin's untouched, subterranean palace.

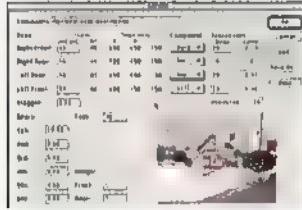
Match wits against this most powerful Emperor within the nebulous depths of his tomb. But take care young adventurer, mortal or mortal means proceed with caution and may fortune open all the doors before you.



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Requires: Double speed CD ROM drive, VGA 486 DX33 MHz or greater, 8MB RAM (Windows '95 requires 12MB RAM), MS-DOS 5.0 (or later) or Windows '95, VGA, hard drive with 8MB free, SVGA, 486 66DX2 9MHz or greater, 8 MB RAM (Windows '95 requires 12MB RAM), MS-DOS 5.0 (or later) or Windows '95, SVGA, hard drive with 8MB free.

Recommended: Pentium, 16MB RAM, Joystick or Driving Wheel/Pedal combo, and Sound Card (most major sound cards supported).

Power Macintosh CD ROM:

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Recommended: Power Macintosh 7100/80 or greater, 16MB RAM, Joystick or Driving Wheel/Pedal combo.

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IBM PC screens shown. Actual screens may vary.

The Big Bang

The Pyrotechniques Of PC Game Explosions

If you appreciate a good fireball as much as the next pyromaniac, you may have noticed that game explosions have grown more convincing in the last year or so. You might not care how digital artists do it, so long as they keep doing it better, but when you think how long it's taken for the PC to realistically portray flying debris, and how challenging it is to illustrate expanding flame balls with binary data and pixels, you start to wonder what they're doing behind those mirrors. Well, the special effects business has long been a refuge for the visually deceptive, and computer games are no exception. Here, then, is a peek behind the curtain at the artists and magicians who make things go "boom!"

IN THE BEGINNING...

Several years ago, game designers used utilitarian paint programs to craft yellow, orange, and red pixels into simple 320x200 bitmap explosions. They needed several frames of different bitmaps to render the explosion's rise and eventual dissipation. Designers programmed these image frames into a small collection of animated pixels called sprites. Sprites can restore the previous pixel configuration on the game screen after they dissipate, or move somewhere else.

Origin artists used animated bitmap sprites in the original *WING COMMANDER* for all Kilathli fighter explosions, painting each frame of the bitmapped fireball on the screen until it became nothing more than a memory. *WING COMMANDER*'s simple pixel-based pyrotechnics bear some resemblance to explosions in the *Star Wars* movies—spherical or ellipsoid in shape, and often appearing as two

explosions in one. Despite the competence of the Origin artists, *WING COMMANDER*'s explosions still didn't look real. Recent games using this technique, like Novalogic's *COMANCHE*, still show less than stellar results. In fact, none of the games that rely on hand-drawn bitmaps for their explosions can quite live up to the visceral feel of the real pyrotechnics used in *Star Wars*.

USE THE SOURCE, LUKE

If you want to make explosions similar to *Star Wars*, why not use the real thing? LucasArts did just that, popping over to affiliate Industrial Light and Magic to borrow an explosion for the first *REBEL ASSAULT*. That's right, just one. It's a joke around LucasArts that every explosion in *Rebel* I was the same explosion, continually altered and modified.

LucasArts again retained ILM's services to produce *REBEL ASSAULT II*. However, this time they asked for the works, with the proviso that explosion edges had to remain within the screen. After spending a mind-numbing afternoon at ILM, LucasArts had their pick of the litter. They transferred the film negatives to D1 video tape, then to high-capacity digital tape cartridges, and finally frame by frame to Autodesk's 3-D STUDIO "flie" animation format.

"Some of the explosions were over 1,500 frames long," recalls Richard Green, lead artist for *REBEL ASSAULT II*. "At 24 frames a second, that explosion takes a long time to develop. Most of the time, we just chopped the explosion in half and used it at different speeds to fit our needs. A slow explosion is more for something big like a planet blowing up."

Because LucasArts wants to give the impression that you are participating in a space battle rather than watching a film,



camera-created side effects such as lens flare and flash had to be cleaned up. Of course, the original film captured the "reality" of the explosions by using millions of colors, which had to be digitally reduced to the 256-color game palette.

After cramming these multi-million-dollar effects into a 256-color format, the designers inserted them into the game. For all animation, LucasArts used 3-D STUDIO to create complex shapes out of wireframe models. Artists applied bitmapped textures onto the frame model polygons. For example, an X-Wing might have texture map renderings of pock-marked steel and carbonized metal thruster cones.

To make an X-Wing explode, an artist places a transparent polygon over the ship. The game "projects" three-dimensional digitized film of an explosion onto this transparent polygon. The original explosions had to remain within the confines of the screen to prevent the polygon from clipping any flash off at the edge.

"We made the explosions large enough to hide a ship," explained Green. "Then we can 'unhide' debris pieces and fly them through the explosion."

"There are a lot of intuitive things," said Green, "that you have to do to make an explosion look just right and believable."

“It’s a joke around LucasArts that every explosion in *REBEL ASSAULT* was the same one.”



REBEL FLAMBÉ Thanks to the special effects pros at Industrial Light and Magic, the explosions in REBEL ASSAULT II are more realistic, and this time they don't all look the same.

like edge-lighting all of the objects in the scene with an orange glow."

SMOKE AND MIRRORS

Today's high-end 3-D animation systems use mathematical systems to generate tiny particles, each with its own heading and variety. LucasArts artists used particle systems to model some effects in Rebel II, but not explosions. "We didn't do explosions in 3-D STUDIO," said Green, "because they tend to look sort of comical— everything is even and unnatural. In

After the credits, REBEL II pulls out all the stops to show a ship exploding on the landing pad. A small initial explosion blows the windows out of the cockpit, followed by a big bang of several mapped explosions, with tons of debris flying out and bouncing off the landing pad.

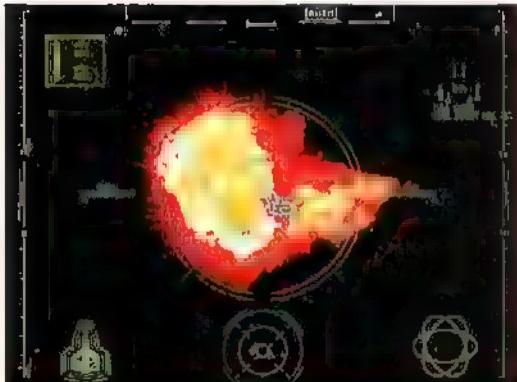
"It made more sense," explained Green, "to have debris flying out when you have an atmosphere. Then gravity can get involved and make things really interesting."

IN THE WINGS

While the early WING COMMANDER titles used hand-created bitmaps for explosions, WING COMMANDER III followed in LucasArts' footsteps by using digitized footage. Origin hired DreamQuest studios, the special effects firm behind *Terminator 2*, to create a library of explosions. DreamQuest recorded the explosions on Beta videotape, which the media lab at Electronic Arts processed into frame-by-frame TIFF (Tagged Image File Format) files. These filled up around a half-dozen CD-ROMs, complete with "alpha channels" providing mask files that correspond perfectly with the image for each frame of the explosion.

WING 3 uses digitized explosions, but the program shuttling information between the game CD-ROM and the computer requires that explosions be less than 15 frames long.

"At 15 frames," explained Tony Marone,



KABOOM! A capital ship goes nuclear in WING COMMANDER IV. Notice the two distinct explosions emanating from ground zero.

fact, I haven't seen a 3-D program yet that can make a realistic fireball.

Particle systems do hold an advantage for creating smoke effects, such as after a laser hits a wall or for interlocking spheres of smoke trailing a doomed ship.

project director for WING COMMANDER IV, "you lose a lot of 'wow' potential."

In WING IV, the game's installation program loads the explosion animation to a player's hard disk, allowing the animation to stream directly from the faster drive. This means that explosions can be between 50 and 75 frames long.

WING IV's explosions appear in a manner similar to REBEL ASSAULT, with one primary difference: WING COMMANDER uses a free-form 3-D engine, while many graphics in REBEL ASSAULT are "pre-rendered." Origin pre-rendered the explosions in WING IV into compact animation files, but it's impossible to predict when or where one will be needed on the screen. This hinders Origin's artists from adding orange glow and edge-lighting effects.

When game play calls for an explosion, the 3-D engine will create a "quad," essentially a free-floating, invisible polygon, over the object about to go nuclear. The quad follows the object (since things zip around rapidly in a WING dogfight). The game texture maps an animated explosion onto the quad in a way similar to REBEL ASSAULT.

To make the explosions seem as real as possible, the Origin artists work with the raw TIFF frames to combine several explosions, and use particle systems to create sparks, add a shockwave effect, and anything else to make it "better than real."

"Even with the raw footage," said Chris Douglas, production designer for WING IV and lead artist for WING III, "you can play around with it and spruce it up a lot."

For the larger explosions, such as a crumbling capital ship, several explosion areas might be combined into a single animation.

"We don't change the explosion," said Marone, "for different player facings. It's drawn square-on, but you can't tell that it's flat or not perfectly matched in the heat of battle."

Years ago, just a few orange and red pixels would have satisfied us all, but as our games evolve and become more and more like our favorite movies, we want our game pyrotechnics to be just as flashy and real. After all, where's the heat without the flames? ■

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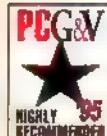
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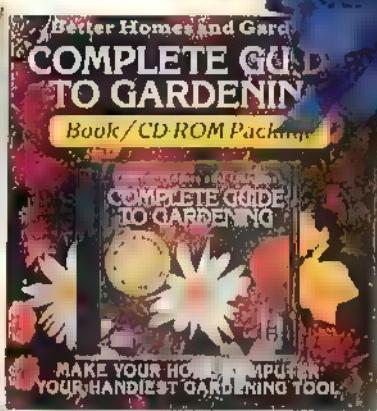
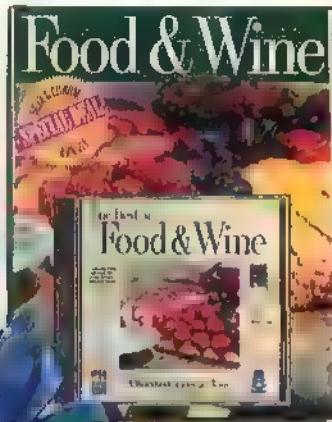
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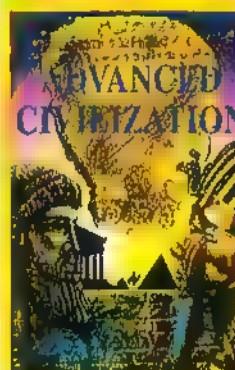
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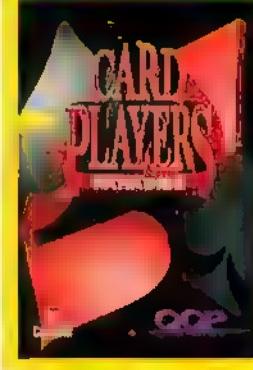
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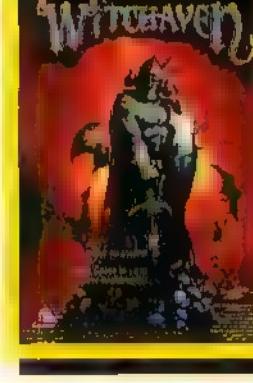
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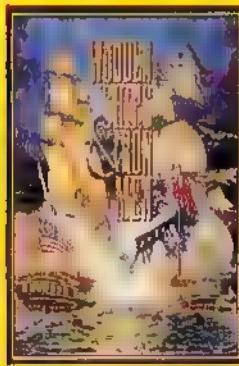
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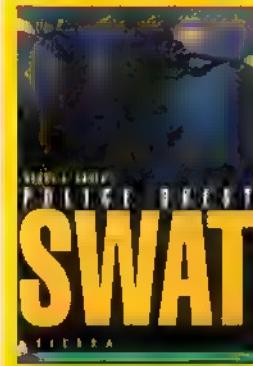
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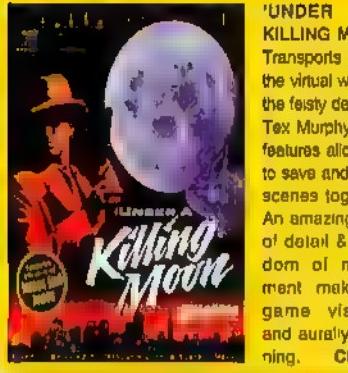
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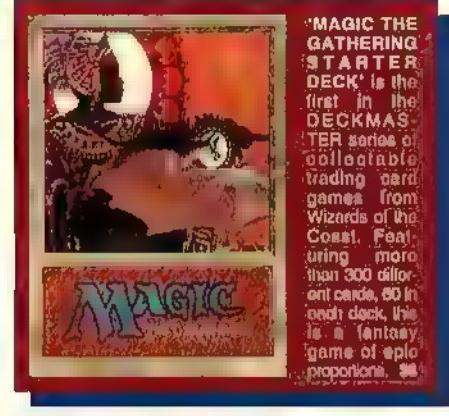
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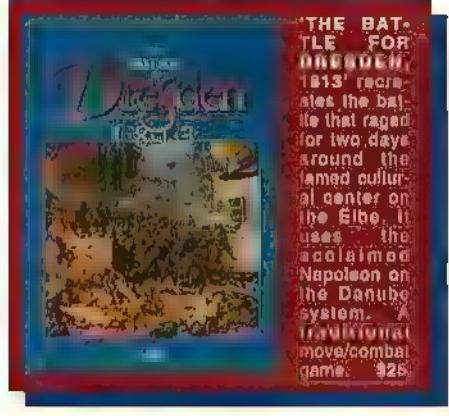
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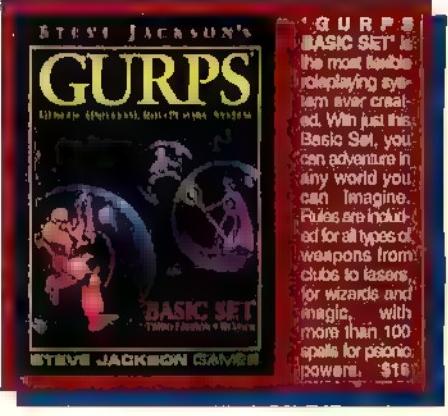
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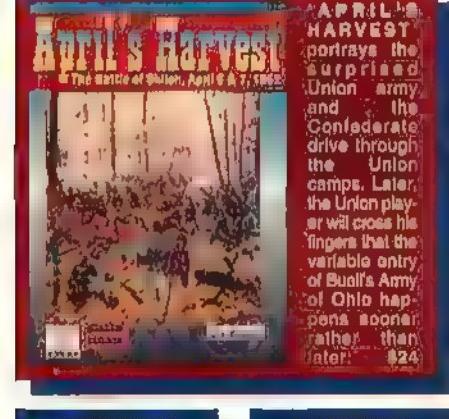
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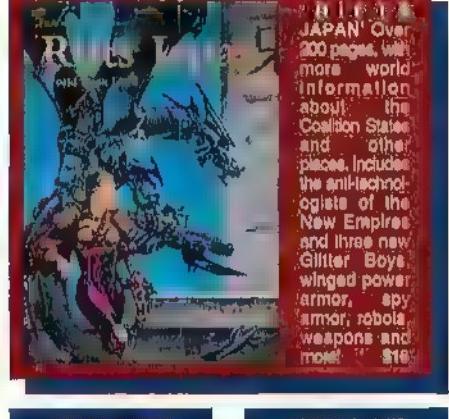
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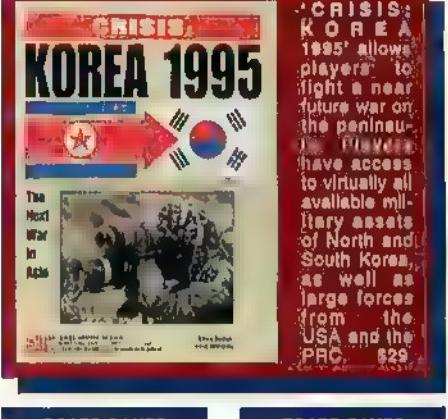
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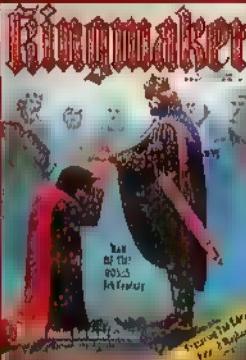
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Champions Of Might & Magic

New World's ANVIL OF DAWN Casts Quite A Spell

In the world of Tempest, typical of worlds in fantasy games, is in trouble. An evil ruler, The Warlord, has sent his armies rampaging out of Desolation and across the land, and nothing can stop him. At best, the armies of Tempest can manage only a holding action, and even that won't last much longer. The only chance left is to discover the source of the Warlord's power and destroy it. Five champions are sent out with that mission. They are the last hope of Tempest; if they fail, the Warlord will be victorious, and a very dark age will descend upon the world.

So the game begins, and you choose one of those five to maneuver as your

own character; this is a single-player journey. While the characters are pre-created, you can take them as is or rearrange the stats to your liking. There are four: strength, stamina, agility, and power, and you have a total of 20 points to distribute among them.

Strength, naturally, determines how much you can carry without becoming encumbered, and a high strength also means more damage done in melee combat. Stamina measures how quickly you become fatigued when exerting yourself, and agility is used in determining chances to hit a target. Power is related to magic, and governs how many spell points you have at the start of the game. It also has an effect on the spells you cast: a higher power rating means more potent spells.

THAT OL' BLACK MAGIC

There are seven magic disciplines: Earth, Air, Fire, Water, Lightning, Flesh and Void. Each discipline has only three

ware company, seems to have bought a clue on their way to the computer game industry superhighway. Their first game (as yet untitled) follows the familiar formula of mysterious, gorgeously-rendered rooms filled with puzzles to solve. But here, the puzzles, while sometimes arcane, do actually relate to the story. The entire game takes place in a "Fantasy Island"-type resort for rock stars—with a mindset every bit as strange and fresh as it sounds. Release is tentatively set for Spring—we'll keep you posted.

CRYSTAL BALL

► Now that Al Lowe has finished the family-safe TORIN'S PASSAGE (see the review in this section), he is busy designing LEISURE SUIT LARRY 7. Fans of Al's more usual risqué humor can expect the lounge lizard, along with the usual bevy of beauteous babes, to return with tongue firmly in cheek by Christmas '96.

► In the crowded sub-genre of Myst-alikes, it's always nice to see something with a different slant. Tribeka Interactive, Robert DeNiro's fledgling soft-

or four spells—and they total a mere 24 in all. That is low compared to some games that overwhelm you with long spell lists, but actually makes a lot of sense. Most people don't use all of the spells available in a game; typically, they settle on a few and forget the rest.

The spells in Anvil are certainly sufficient, and you probably won't be casting too many of them as it is; each spell has its own power point cost, and of course the better spells require more. Even a powerful character will run out quickly when spells are in the 300+ point range.

Therefore, even with magic, you can expect to do a lot of physical combat, which is in real-time. Four weapon skills are in the game: hacking (axes and hammers), slinging (swords), thrusting (spears) and ranged (bows and thrown weapons).

At the start, your character is a complete novice in both weapon and magic skills, having a level of 1 in all of them. Increases come with experience, which is measured by bar graphs, one graph each for magic and weapons. The more fighting you do, the faster the weapons graph increases; the more spells you cast, the faster the magic graph increases.

When a bar is totally filled in, a level is achieved, and you can choose which weapon skill or magic discipline to raise. It doesn't matter if, for instance, all your

You can expect to see different critters each place you go, and there are plenty to go around.

GTIPS!

► Steelripper, a nifty spear in ANVIL OF DAWN (a fantastic thrown weapon), has a disturbing tendency to disappear at odd times, especially when you're fighting Slog Riders. The spear seems to go

experience comes from using a sword; you can increase the level of any weapon skill you prefer. The same holds true in relation to the magic disciplines: a level increase can be applied to any of them you want.

The one trick is that you have to exit the dungeon to obtain the benefits of the new levels. They don't take effect until you come out of whatever hellhole you're currently investigating. Once you're out, a screen is displayed with the weapons skills or disciplines and you make your choice. Note that you don't have to finish the dungeon; you can step outside any time, take your level increases, then step back in and continue.

THAT'S ME, AND THERE'S MY TRUSTY SWORD GERTRUD

The interface is simple. On screen, down the right-hand side in a vertical column, are a portrait of your character, two bars representing hit points and spell points, two squares showing what is held in hand, icons representing known spells, and a tiny auto-map showing your immediate vicinity.

To cast a spell, you simply click on the appropriate icon. They are shown in groups of eight; when you know more than that, scroll bars appear so you can shift around among them. When spells are cast in hand-to-hand combat, the target stops fighting until the spell is completed. However, if a blow is already incoming, or you're up against something that uses a ranged attack, the action will continue during the casting.

To fight, you can left-click on the hand box that has your weapon, or (better), you can position the cursor over your target and right-click to swing. The cursor method is better, because you can see the hitpoint bar of your opponent. This gives you a good idea of how tough he (or it) is,

through the target, and is never seen again. Save frequently when using the spear as a precaution.

► In ANVIL's Gorge Keep, the man you free from the ice block tells you how to raise the portcullis to leave by the back door and get across the chasm. However, it is entirely possible to get across the chasm another way, and

and how much damage you're doing with your blows.

Items are picked up by left-clicking, and can be transferred directly to the big inventory box with a right-click. The item can go anywhere in that box, however; so every once in awhile, you'll need to rearrange things a bit. Fortunately, when you place an item in a particular spot, it will stay there. This is especially handy for grouping like items together.

Movement is by mouse or keyboard, using steps; I preferred the keyboard most of the time. The view is first-person 3-D, with 90 degree turns, similar to E.M. OR THE BUTCHER, but smoother.

The graphics are quite good. Each area is distinctive; you are not presented

come into the keep by the back door, using a special item to lower the gate. If you enter that way, do NOT play with the winch, leave it alone, or you won't be able to leave by the back again. That will mean a very long trip around to reach the other means of crossing the chasm.

le, hardly the norm when spellcasting in most RPGs.

DEMONS DIFFER, BUT THEY ALL DIE

The dungeons have their own types of monsters as well. There are generally two kinds or, on rare occasions, three, running around the premises. You can expect to see different critters each place you go, and there are plenty to go around.

Happily, once disposed of, they do not regenerate, which gives you time to explore afterwards.

Automapping is simply excellent. The big maps show everything where you've been (unexplored areas are blank of



CRITTERMANIA Before being flamed by Infernal Bones or becoming lunchmeat for the Devourer of Souls, you'd be well-advised to pick up Soulwrought, the best sword in the game.

with the dreary sameness of some other games, where it's hard to tell the dungeons apart after a while.

Magic spells all have their own individual effects, and even the spell names are refreshingly different. It's neat watching the Iron Fist of Chaos form from the ground and go sailing down a corridor, and the Laughing Skull of Thunderous Might appearing in the air clicks a chick-

course), including locations of live monsters, dead monsters (if they leave a body behind), doors, chests, pits, stairs, objects, teleporters, altars (which renew spell and hit points), spell reflectors, and many other things besides. You can write your own notes on the maps, and print them off, too.

Some levels (and dungeons), by the way, are large. In this game, there is no

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RESURRECTION

Clicks in The Armor

ANVIL OF DAWN does have a few bugs (seemingly inevitable these days), although overall it was pretty smooth sailing. Because HMI forgot to tell New World about a couple of things, Gravis owners will get voice and effects, but no music. This can be worked around by running Soundblaster emulation instead.

Something more serious is what happens after you take out the Castellan in the Evil Stronghold. As you run the cursor over the expired prisoner, a talk balloon (indicating conversation) comes up. If you click the mouse the game will go into a permanent hang, and the only way out is to reboot entirely.

New World is aware of these problems, and by the time you read this, a patch should be available, both directly from them and on the nets, to correct the problems. I've already checked out the Gravis fix, and the music is much better with real Gravis support.

substitute for patience and thoroughness. There is a lot to get through, so take your time, and always keep an eye on the map.

It's interesting when your character encounters one of the other four champions during the quest. Perhaps not surprisingly, they aren't doing so well, and some, indeed, are almost dead when you meet them. They do, however, usually last long enough to give you something or tell you something, which is thoughtful of them.

Voice-overs in the game are done well. People have actual conversations here, as opposed to the usual melodramatic declamations that occur in so many other products. Emotions are expressed, but not in an overblown, hammy way. You can listen to it all without cringing.

The music is also good. There is a different tune for each dungeon, and the tunes are varied enough so that they usually don't get on your nerves. The music is also well-matched to the particular area.

When you finally reach the penultimate moment when you confront the

Warlord, it may surprise you. If you expected the usual raving maniac, "I'm going to rule the world, and you can't stop me, hahaha!" hysteria, our baddie here is Mr. Cool, calm and rather seductive. The experience is very much like Darth Vader and the Emperor trying to bring Luke over to the dark side. The entire ending is a refreshing change of pace from the usual shenanigans that go on at this moment, although some may be shocked by it.

Another nice touch is the Black Gnarl, the Dwarf who forges the special container you need. His hand is neither out for money, nor does he have some silly errand for you to perform. As he says, "The price is the good. The more difficult the task, the more good it must do in the world." When was the last time we came across something like this?

A FAMILIAR RING

The game does have its weak points. Anvil bears a strong resemblance to THI-



SIMONING, especially in its reliance on floor plates, teleporters, and rolling boulders for the majority of puzzles.

Fortunately, these are simpler to figure out, although by now, we'd expect that Dreamforge could have come up with a little more variety. As it is, the weight-the-plates, bop-several-times-into-a-teleporter, dash-past-the-rolling-boulder stuff becomes old pretty quickly.

Players hoping to run a heavy-duty magic user will be disappointed. As mentioned earlier, the better spells are costly, and power regeneration is slow. There are altars to restore power, but they are not always convenient. Likewise, the magic plants can restore power, but they don't return much. Inevitably, you'll be spending a lot of time just slouching around in a safe place, reading a book while you wait for the points to come back.

In addition, there are certain areas where magic won't work, or spell reflectors are in the way, so only melee combat is possible. Skimping too much on fight-

ing skills can thus lead to problems; even the strongest mages will need to be good with a sword.

It would also have been nice to have at least some idea of how much damage the offensive spells were capable of doing. While you know the damage potential of the weapons, there is no information at all about the spells, which is an amazing omission.

There is no way to sidestep, so combat technique is limited to swinging at an opponent, then quickly stepping back to avoid the return strike, then stepping forward to continue the battle. It's not always possible to do that, though, and the ability to move off to the side would have been very helpful in confined areas, or when facing multiple opponents.

The documentation is in error with regard to magic amulets. While the manual says the amulets "permanently" increase stats, this is not the case. An amulet provides an increase only while



WHO NEEDS A COMPASS? If the entrance to Fire Mountain looks foreboding, just use the excellent Automap once you're inside.

being worn, and of course, you can only wear one amulet at a time.

Overall, *Anvil of Dawn* is a dungeon romp with several points of interest, and a couple of pleasant surprises. While there were annoying moments—Dreamforge is still too fond of floor plates, and the magic system needs some tweaking—I did enjoy playing the game. It was also nice to see a product that didn't have those overused words "dark," "dungeon," or "keep" in the title. **8**

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Quest Busters

Scorpia Shows You How To Get On With The Journey

He! Help! I'm drowning! Wow, is there a lot of stuff out this Christmas! There hasn't been so much new product crowding the shelves in a long time. After years of occasional releases, we're suddenly inundated with games, and it's going to be hard keeping up with it for awhile.

On the other hand, everything is hitting at once, and just as this column is going to press, so there's not been time yet for questions about the newer arrivals to come in (although I'm sure that mail will be picking up a bit in the near future. Culp). Which means that this month, we're still looking at letters about the older games.

Before we get to that, though, a reminder to readers outside the United States: please remember to include your return address somewhere in your letter. There's no way I can send you a reply if I don't know where you are. Not too long ago, a letter came in from Rianto S. in Indonesia, and he's still waiting for an answer, because no return address was included. So be sure to put that in somewhere before you send off any questions. And now, on to the good stuff:

LANDS OF LORI: This game certainly has some staying power, and it seems a lot of people playing it these days are getting stuck in the same places. One of those is the Faith door on level 3 of the White Tower. First, the room beyond doesn't have anything vital in it, so if you want to skip that, you can do so without worrying about missing something important. However, if you want to check it out (there are some goodies in there, but save before you touch anything!), you'll need to prove your faith first. That can be done downstairs in the basement (of course, you'll have to find the key for the door to

the stairs first, heh). After you've obtained a certain item down there, the Faith door will open for you.

STAR TREK: A FINAL UNITY: Some adventurers are having a little trouble with a certain power generator on Allanon. This one is a bit tricky, but not too tough, really. It's an instance where some violence will be necessary... after you've taken the necessary precautions to avoid blowing yourself up. Drain a little off the top, as it were

or place the tip more than once for the black gate to appear.

ENTOMORPH: The Queen Bee in the hive is a difficult prospect (just seeing how big she is may be enough to daunt some people!). It's entirely possible that you won't be able to kill her in the first encounter, especially at higher difficulty levels. If that's the case, don't despair, and don't try to win the first time around. When your bee is killed, simply call in



DATA, OPEN THE DAMN DOOR! If you're stuck outside the generator room on Allanon, try jamming it open with something pointy when the droid comes through.

ULTIMA VIII — PAGAN: The endgame, where you place blackrock fragments on the giant pentagram, has proved puzzling to several players (especially if they aren't playing the patched version, which gives a little help here). First, keep in mind that the fragments all have to be placed in the right spots on the diagram; you can't just set them down on any point. There is a relation between where you energized the pieces and where you put them on the pentagram. Second, the tip should be energized and placed last. In some circumstances, it may be necessary to click

another one and go back to the fray. Eventually, you'll wear the queen down and take her out.

DISCWORLD: Plenty of questions about this game, and no wonder; it's certainly one of the tougher adventures to come along in awhile. Many have trouble in Act 1, trying to get into places that are closed. Generally, you can figure that if there's no way in, then there's just no way in during that Act. Some locations (such as the Inn) only open later in the game. Speaking of later in the game, if you're having trouble with getting into Shades, maybe you need

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to visit the palace and have a chat with someone there.

RETURN TO ZORK: Another game that just keeps hanging in there. Some folks are having a bit of difficulty locating the final piece of the Disk of Felbozz. This one is hidden, and it will take violent action to reveal it. I hope I'm not boaring anyone here; or are you lost in the woods?

RAVENLOFT II: STONE PROPHET: Sometimes, people are just too eager to go everywhere and see everything all at once. It doesn't work that way in this game. For instance, getting into the Sphinx takes awhile, because you have to do the underground chambers of the Harvest Temple first (and before that, you have to mess around in the Temple of Set). Likewise, reaching the Temple of Ra means doing the Sphinx first. And you'll need to do both the Harvest Temple and the Troll hangout before you can do anything with the Royal Burial Hall. So do take your time here, and complete what's

open first. Otherwise, you may wander around that desert for a long time!

PRISONER OF ICE: Naturally, you'd like to escape from that cell in Schlossadler Base before you come to a sorry end. So would anyone; after all, there's a world to be saved. However, it isn't quite so easy as it looks. First, you'll have to wait for Dietrich to show up and make his little proposition. Then you have to move quickly, because time will be short. A diversion is necessary, and that paper you got from Dietrich will help, if you use it in the right place (luckily, there aren't many to choose from). Next is dealing with the guard, which shouldn't be too hard (don't sit down on the job here). I don't recommend using the front door to leave, though. It's better to (ahem) vent your frustrations elsewhere.

THUNDERSCAPE: In the Radiant Keep, on the third level, you may find yourself in a room without an exit (the door closes when you pull a lever, which you have to do). Sorry to say, you're gonna have to do

some jumping to get out of here. You can try going up the short stairs to the ledge and leaping over to the other side, or you can try for the big block suspended in the middle of the room. I had more luck with the block, using a running jump to reach the top. That one is a matter of timing, and it will probably take several tries. Remember to be upight (not in crouching mode) whichever place you're trying to reach.

And that's about it for this look in the mailbag. Remember if you need help with an adventure game, you can reach me in the following ways:

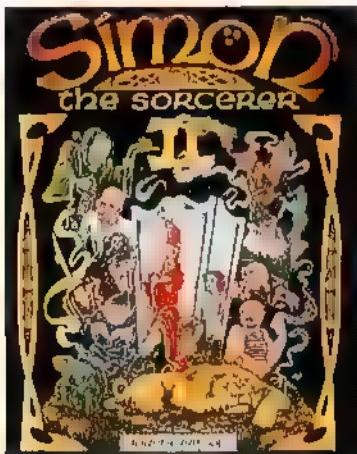
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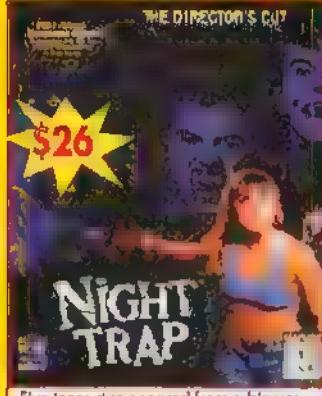
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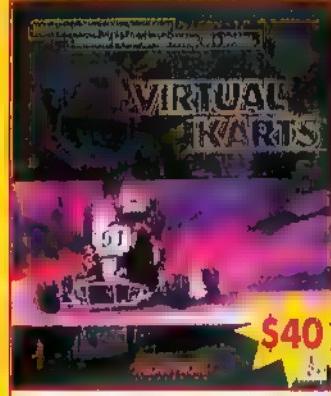
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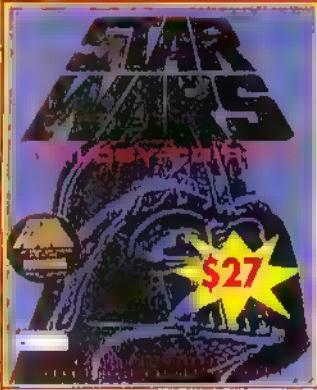
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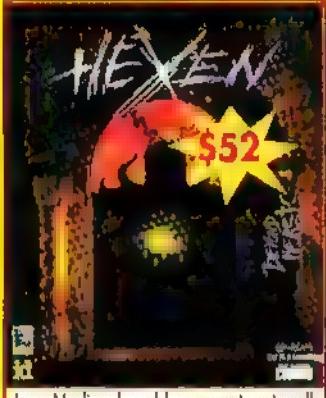
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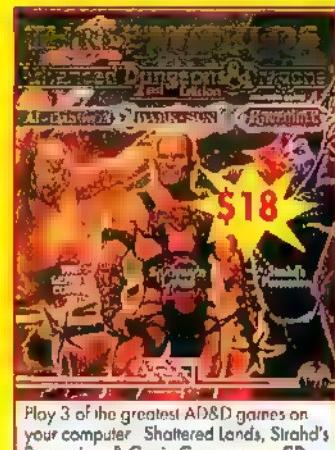
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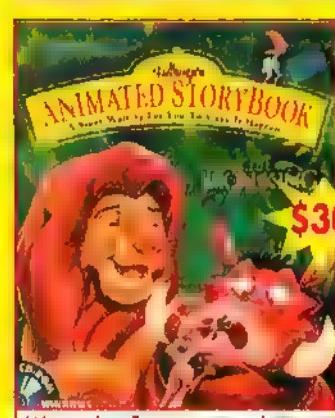
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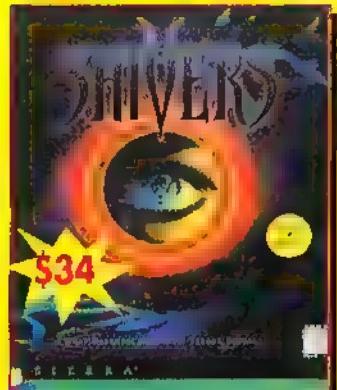
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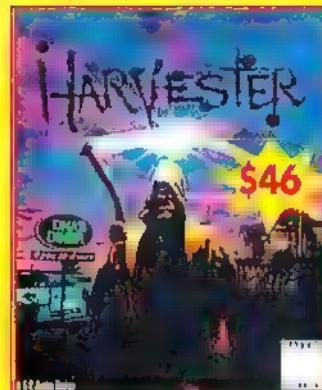
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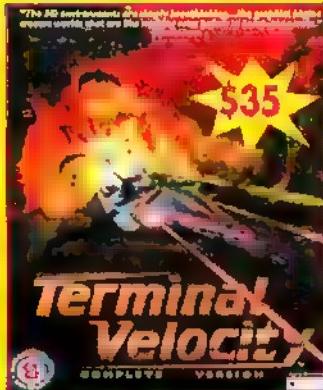
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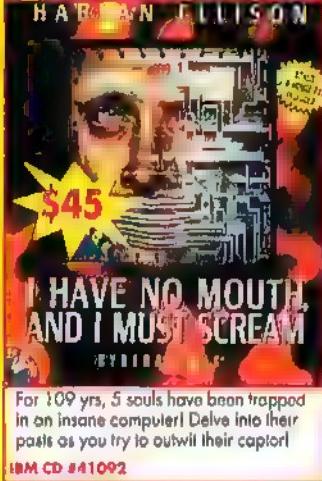
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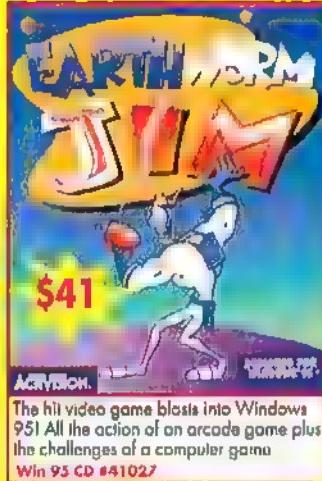
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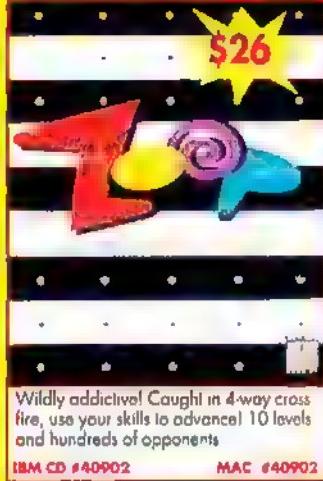
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Stonekeep Is Worth Its Wait

After Several Years In Development, STONEKEEP Delivers On The Promise

by Petra Schlunk

Many years of anticipation and despite the scoffing of cynics, Interplay's role-playing adventure STONEKEEP finally did hit the shelves in early November. Feeling a bit like a kid with an early Christmas present, I went straight for the game, deciding to pass over (for the nonce) the enclosed novella, *Their Awakening*. I wasn't disappointed, because there was more than enough story in the beginning sequences to whet my appetite for the game. The city of Stonekeep is shown being swallowed up by a darkness beyond which you see the perpetrator of the evil deed, the Shadowking. Only one boy, Drake, survives, being whisked away in the nick of time by a mysterious, cloaked figure. When Drake returns ten years later to the site of the devastation, a vision of a lovely goddess appears before him. Then, the goddess of Earth, tells Drake that he must descend to the lost city and retrieve the nine receptacles (these are orbs). In order to free Stonekeep and her To keep him safe, she frees his spirit from his body and sends it down into the lost city where the adventure begins.

JUST THE ARTIFACTS, PLEASE!

Drake arrives in the city of Stonekeep clad only in pants (although how he can wear these, acquire armor and weapons, and get wounded in battle while existing only as a spirit is a wonder never really explained) and a couple of ancient artifacts. One of these is a mirror that lets him see himself and which provides a compass for his travels, the other is a scroll that allows him to carry all the objects he finds

as two-dimensional representations. While a bit stilted in concept, this scroll is still a nice device, allowing Drake to carry all the loot he finds without getting encumbered along the way. This brings us to one of the potential caveats of STONEKEEP: you cannot create or

choose your own character. Nor can you roll your own stats. Drake comes with minimal health, agility, and strength, as well as marginal skills in a few areas. As Drake practices wielding weapons, casting spells, and sneaking around, his skills in these areas will improve and, when they do, his agility, strength, and health will too. Although Drake starts his travels alone, he won't remain that way. At any time, up to three other characters, including dwarves, a faerie, a goblin, and an elf, may have joined him in his quest to free Stonekeep. As the player, you have no say over who will join the party; that depends entirely on the story line. Other characters join and leave the party for their own reasons. Although you can re-equip many of these characters, you don't have to worry about controlling their actions. They will fight on their own.

Drake's travels are in first person perspective and will take him through Stonekeep city, some sewers, temples, mines, a faerie realm, ice caverns, a dwarven fortress, a palace of shadows, and Khull Khuum's



PLAY IT AGAIN, SAME SH The resident troop of Faerie Players will play your favorite fantasy tunes in up-tempo Pixie style, but it's gonna cost you.

(the Ultimate Bad Guy's) tower. There are over twenty levels in all, offering some variety in location and feel as the game progresses. There is a certain sameness in the look of many of these locations, although efforts were made to relieve monotony by varying the color and music on each level.

SKEET SHOOTING

Movement is controlled by the keypad or arrow keys, while combat and object manipulation are controlled by the mouse. There are not many specialized movement types (such as jumping or running), although levitation is possible later in the game. Annoyingly, while the party can move forward and backward and turn, it can't move sideways! This makes some of the real-time combat encounters quite difficult, since the monsters can attack before Drake's party can turn and face them to counterattack.

What advantage the monsters enjoy is somewhat mitigated by their own movement limitations. Often, Drake can stand

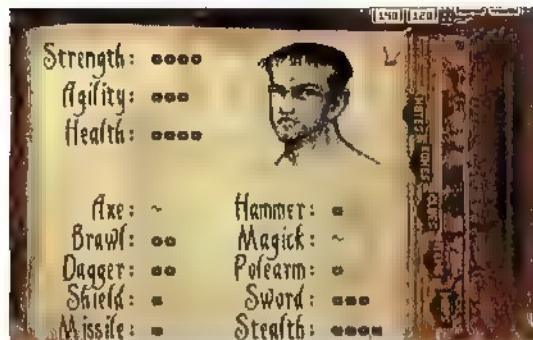
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System Requirements:
486-33 or better (486-66 or Pentium recommended), 8 MB RAM or higher, VGA/SVGA graphics, 40 MB hard drive space. 2x CD-ROM mouse, supports Sound Blaster compatible sound cards

Protection: None

Designer: Chris Taylor
Publisher: Interplay
(714) 553-6678
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HE WHO FIGHTS & RUNS AWAY Early on, Drake looks tough, but with low shield, missile and melee skills, our hero is better off using his excellent Stealth to sneak away from trouble

outside of doorways or at the ends of long hallways and fire into rooms with missile weapons without being counterattacked. Since, unlike many role-playing games, you can't either weaken or toughen the monsters you meet, this problem can be viewed as a feature. If you are finding the monsters difficult to beat in melee combat

Otherwise, the combat system is thoughtfully designed. Even veteran role-players will appreciate that combat pauses when you search your inventory for healing roots, alternate weapons, or other items. It's also nice that even when you are surprised, you can simply click on your target in melee, and any hand-to-hand weapon will be used to attack, without the necessity of a lot of preparation.

ADVENTURER, HEAL THYSELF!

At the beginning of the game, if Drake is injured in a fight he must find a healing fountain or use various potions or roots picked up during his travels. Since there are not a lot of healing fountains about, this necessitates a lot of running up and down stairs and across levels to replenish hit points in between encounters. This can become rather tedious after a while. Later, however, Drake will learn healing spells and, mercifully, this running around will end.

Speaking of magic, as Drake explores ever farther he will find runecasters and scrolls with runes. The runes symbolize spells (such as healing, armor, invisibility, and a myriad of offensive spells). Drake can scribe these runes onto his runecasters and use the runecasters to cast the spells.

Runecasters have a limited number of charges but can be recharged at various locations. Much later in the game, Drake will find teleportation spells that allow him to go back and forth from his party's current point to a location of his choice (for example, right next to a place that recharges runecasters).

At this point, Drake can cast spells to his heart's content, significantly increasing his party's odds in battle. There are a number of other helpful features in STONEKEEP. When Drake finds objects, he can add them automatically to a stack of identical objects or an appropriate container (such as a quiver) in his inventory. On one of the early levels, Drake will find a journal. This journal holds all sorts of useful information including his statistics, spells currently affecting him, all the runes he has learned, any clues he has heard, a list of all items he has found, and maps of all levels he has explored. The maps can be marked and each mark identified in whatever way you choose. This feature is done very well in that the information you write about the mark is not placed on the map itself (where it might obscure parts of the map) but in another part of the journal.

Clicking on the mark will take you to the relevant journal entry and vice versa. Finally, the journal has a place in which you can take your own notes.

Of course, Drake won't just be walking around, fighting monsters, and casting spells. He will find a lot of objects, and one of the main challenges in STONEKEEP is figuring out exactly what different objects (especially the orbs) do and how to use them (by clicking them on something or someone, or even by dropping them!). There are many loose bricks and buttons that open secret compartments and passageways with goodies, but these treasures are rarely vital for progressing in the game, thus rewarding the careful

adventurer without penalizing the more casual player. There are also many puzzles in the game, although most of them are not too difficult to solve. In general, someone or something, such as a scroll, will have given Drake a clue that will aid in solving a puzzle he encounters. The puzzles become more intense and frequent as the game progresses, while combat, inter-



► Keep a close-range weapon handy for close combat, or you'll get thrashed by creatures like this Throgg.



► The combat spell used here is fine, but at medium range, the Dark Dwarf will be able to close for hand-to-hand combat.



► A spell cast from farther away will wear your adversary down before reaching your party. Always attack from far away or through doorways for an edge.



SHOW SOME SENSE, MAN Your companions have half a brain (unlike many RPGs). Here, Farli the dwarf suggests that you let sleeping dragons be.

estingly, becomes less intense and frequent (possibly because Drake has better weapons, spells, and skills near the end).

CHARMED, I'M SURE

As mentioned above, one of the potential weaknesses of STONEKEEP is that you cannot create your own character nor have you any say over the composition of your party. In fact, you have no conversational options either! This could have been a ter-

rible flaw, but STONEKEEP manages to overcome this weakness with an intriguing story line and charming characters. Given the limitations inherent in trying to tell a story on scrolls and in one or two sentences uttered by characters now and then, STONEKEEP's story is well told. Two great worlds battle, with Earth caught in the middle, and the gods themselves imprisoned, as the power of the Shadowking increases. Many mysteries are revealed; we learn of the Elves and their demise; meet the funny and charming faeries, and discover why a Dwarf is subjected to neck-looth, total banishment from his people. It is these characters and their stories that really redeem STONEKEEP from its limitations in role-playing options.

Like most games, STONEKEEP suffers from a few (some important) bugs. Furthermore, the epilogue scenes of the game are disappointingly short, especially considering how nice the introduction and story are (and how much time and

effort they take to reach). Nonetheless, it is obvious that a lot of thought and heart went into the game's design and production. It is most definitely worth playing for its delightful characters alone, but it can also be enjoyed as an old fashioned, fun dungeon romp with monsters to kill, treasures to find, traps to spring, and puzzles to solve. Even with the long, long wait, this game is well worth the time for any RPG fan. **6**

APPEAL: Successful on many levels; both hard-core and newcomers to role-playing should enjoy this.

PROS: Charming story line and characters, nicely written dialogues, lots of levels, spells, puzzles and objects de fun all combine to make for an enjoyable role-playing game.

CONS: Some levels look repetitive, and the epilogue is disappointing. Limited monster AI and party mobility make combat less interesting than it could be.



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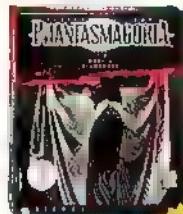
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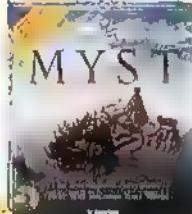
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Kings Quest VIII?

Sierra Reaches Down Lowe For A Comical Animated Adventure, But Torin Can't Hang With The Leisure Suit Set

by Charles Ardai



by this game wasn't called King's Quest VIII remains a mystery to me. The design follows a similar kid-safe, mother-approved formula. A light, humorous tone offsets darker

elements in the plot. Cute animated plants and animals tell jokes and give out information, and characters present a player with simple puzzles to solve in exchange for help. Sierra made TORIN'S PASSAGE as non-confrontational as a Saturday morning cartoon, with the trade-off that few gamers will find it intriguing.

Designer Al Lowe, the prankster behind the legendary Leisure Suit Larry games, saves TORIN'S PASSAGE from being a complete KING'S QUEST clone. Just when you're about to O.D. on *Aladdin*-style canned corn, a character will bump his head on the menu bar, or reach outside of the main window to start pushing buttons on the interface. Few other designers would hide a black-and-white



MIXED MEDIA Designer Al Lowe splices up the banal fare of TORIN'S PASSAGE with a few surprises, including this black and white TV sitcom spoof.

pandry of a '50s TV sitcom in the middle of a fantasy game. Despite these refreshing moments of Lowe's trademark humor, he mostly sticks to a banal, Disney-flavored formula.

TORIN'S TEPID ADVENTURE

Players familiar with Lowe's bowel-centered view of the world will be surprised to hear that he stages gameplay in TORIN'S PASSAGE outside of the protagonist's lower intestine. Torin lives as a farmhand in a nondescript shire in The Lands Above. Never one to be subtle, Lowe quickly starts pushing Torin's buttons. As an infant prince, he witnesses his royal parents murdered in their beds by an unscrupulous

advisor. Some years later, he looks on helplessly as an evil sorceress named Lycentia traps his foster parents in amber and takes them away. That's two sets of parents lost in the first five minutes of the game.

The game centers around Torin's search for his kidnapped foster parents. His quest takes him to the Lands Below, four concentric worlds located within the planet-like layers of a jumbo jawbreaker. Escarpa is a vulture-filled wasteland of sheer cliffs. Pergola has lush greenery, rolling hills, and miniature inhabitants who swarm all over him *a la* "Gulliver's Travels." (Lowe's wicked streak shines through here. If you don't move Torin quickly enough when the cute little Pergolans he him up, they will eat all the flesh off of his bones.) After passing through volcanic Asthenia, Torin encounters the core world of Ienebrous, where the climax happens.

Torin adds another dimension to his quest when he meets King Rupert of



Price: \$59.95

System Requirements:
IBM compatible 486 or better Win 95, Win 3.1 or DOS 5.0+, 8 MB RAM, 256 color SVGA graphics, 2 MB hard drive space, 2x CD ROM drive, mouse, sound card with DAC
of Players: 1

Protection: None (CD must be in drive)

Designer: Al Lowe

Publisher: Sierra On-Line
Bellevue, WA

(800) 757-7707 (800) 649-4904

Reader Service #: 323



ERRAND BOY In order to gain access to the Lands Below, Torin gets cowed into completing several time-consuming tasks for this crazy coot

Escarpa and hears of his beautiful, missing daughter Leenah. When he finds Leenah tied to a stake in Pergola and frees her, he has a romantic interest. He lets her tied to the stake, hoping to see the Pergolans strip off her flesh, or at least her skin, but Sierra doesn't let Lowe indulge himself that much. Torin also has a purple cat-shaped sidekick named Boogle, who accompanies him throughout the game. Like *Plastic Man*, Boogle can re-form his stretchy protoplasmic body into all sorts of useful shapes, such as a lantern, a shovel, and so on.

Unfortunately, Boogle and many other characters in *TORIN'S PASSAGE* debase the game into nothing more than an alternative Saturday morning cartoon show. Animated in slapstick detail and given a burbling Scooby Doo voice, Boogle gets old quick. Like other insufferable cartoon animals, he talks in silly, mashed-up words. Lycentus's hulking right-hand monster Dreep is similarly unbearable. The designers strained too hard to be cute, and achieved only a phony cuteness that leaves a bad aftertaste. It shows in the exaggerated orbits of Boogle and Dreep's googly eyes, in the cloying romantic scenes between Torin and Leenah, and throughout the rest of the game.

IT BOOGLES THE MIND

I suppose kids might enjoy the cartoonish quality of *TORIN'S PASSAGE*. *He-Man* and *The Smurfs* were both highly rated shows for heaven's sake. The game is playable, but from Al Lowe's *Leenah and Stumpy* rather than *Strawberry Shortcake*. In *TORIN'S PASSAGE*, Lowe mostly offers us a plate of tripe, accented very sparingly with his patented satire.

Ironically, Lowe dishes up the same vapid dialogue with a straight face that he lampoons in the game's in-joke TV show parody. The parody studio audience doubles over in canned hysterics in response to unfunny jokes and exclams. "Awwww..." in unison after hearing syrupy romance lines. It's a device that could have been used throughout the game. "You're far too beautiful for me to leave you here!" says Torin when he finds Leenah bound and helpless.

"Awwww... So help me," the sprinted folk retorts. "If you set me free, I'll scratch your eyes out."

(Laughter.)

Later the smitten prince says, "You are beautiful, wonderful, perfect. Will I see you again?"

"You must!" says Leenah.

"Awwww..."

Then, they go to kiss, but Boogle pops his fury purple head between them spoiling the moment. "Boogle..." Torin shouts, rolling his eyes.

(Cue to chuckles and applause.)

The soundtrack, composed by Academy Award winner Michel Legrand, doesn't help. Every generic track sounds like 10 others you've heard before. There's an "oom-pah-pah-pah" tune, swelling theme music suggestive of John Williams' music for *Superman*, a generic romantic theme, a generic "jungle drums" theme, and so forth.

The visuals, though lovely, are equally generic. There's no way to tell that you're in Torin's world rather than, say, Piers Anthony's Xanth. The voice acting is of high quality and utterly unmemorable. Throw in 20 easy puzzles and you have a consistent overall picture. Like an *Ice Capades*.

TORIN'S PASSAGE is a slick, professionally produced exercise of little consequence.

The game has only one major bug, a flaw that makes it impossible for some gamers to save the game after a certain point. Also, even on my Pentium, it runs too slowly for a game where your character has to walk back and forth over the same ground several times, the speed of the animation can become an issue. Speeding up the game was impossible due to hardware limitations. I'd at least have wanted some method to cut the animation sequences short. To the best of my knowledge, generic walks across a single screen can be abbreviated, but any sequence containing animation scenes cannot be cut.

There is also a slight problem with cursor placement. For example, the menu bar appears not when you have your cur-

sor in the upper left-hand corner of the screen, but when it is a little below the upper left-hand corner. To call up the directional arrows that allow you to move from screen to screen, you must position the cursor a little distance away from the edge of the screen rather than at the edge itself. In one scene, you have to tie a rope to Torin's leg and then to a tree limb, but because of cursor quirks, I kept accidentally untangling the already-tied knot rather than tying the one that still remained to be



RATED G The game sugarcoats potentially serious situations (like when Torin gets killed or maimed) for the benefit of younger viewers.

tied. Such quirks annoyed me, and they would have annoyed me even more if I had been nine or ten years old, which I assume is the intended age for this game.

Many nine- or ten-year-olds may find Boogle adorable and the story of *TORIN'S PASSAGE* entirely to their liking—but not precocious ones. *TORIN'S PASSAGE* is a passable game in every sense of the word. It'll do, but I'll pass.

APPEAL: Lovers of *Kings Quest* games and/or Saturday morning cartoon pablum, but not fans of Al Lowe's typical irreverent wackiness.

PROS: Lots of lush animation and an engaging (though generic) storyline.

CONS: There's very little here of Al Lowe's usual comic brilliance, and the whole thing is as flavorless and distinctive as a glass of water.



Bring Home Real Pinball Action



(figure 1)

THE HARD WAY.



(figure 2)

THE EASY WAY.

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Circle Reader Service #130

Spielberg's Comet

DIFFICULTY LEVEL
INTERMEDIATE

Looking Through THE DIG's 2-Year Vapor Trail Reveals A Good Game Underneath

by Martin E. Cirulis

Most SLG games take a long time coming these days (think *MX vs. Warior Z*), it's not that unusual that LucasArts' high-brow adventure is only now seeing the light. Certainly few computer games have such a distinguished pedigree. George Lucas' company, a Steven Spielberg story, dialogue by Orson Scott Card, even a novelization from Alan Dean Foster. While I usually avoid pre-release buzz, I will admit that I anticipated *The Dig*, and to be honest, I wasn't disappointed. Unfortunately, what we might have here is a game too good for its genre.

THE SKY IS FALLING... AGAIN!

The Dig begins with a cliché of SL computer games: a mega-asteroid is on a collision course with the Big Blue Marble, and unless something is done quickly, it'll be cockroaches sitting in a theatre watching HomoSapiens Park in a few million years. As Boston Low, the NASA mission Commander, you must take a crew of experts up in a modified shuttle-craft to nuke the incoming rock into a kinder, gentler orbit. While the mission requires five specialists to succeed, only three will venture down to the asteroid surface. You and two others, a gutsy woman reporter and a slightly superior-sounding Germanic archeologist are assigned to plant the warheads. Though the rationale for sending such an eclectic group instead of a SEAL demo team is a thin one, you'll be willing to suspend a little disbelief as things unfold.



DESERT SPACE-ISLE The attention to sound, backgrounds and other details make you feel as though you really are marooned on an alien world.

For some, just getting there and deflecting the killer rock would be adventure enough, but for this game it barely rates as a first act. I think I'll be giving nothing away when I tell you that things really start after you deflect the asteroid into orbit, when your excursion team ventures back down to the blasted surface out of plain of curiosity. Once there, you "dig" around a bit and find yourself in an E.T.-version of "Mouselrap." In reality, the killer rock is an Alien IQ test for the Earth and you pass it with flying colors. Unfortunately, your prize is an apparently one-way trip to another world, courtesy of the asteroid, which turns into an E.T. starship and takes you to a place "far, far away." (And "long, long ago," if you're a fan of relativity.)

From the moment your "ship" evaporates around you—and you are greeted by

nothing except blowing sand, high mountains and two strange moons in the sky—you and your team realize that not only are you not in Kansas anymore, but the nearest McDonald's is probably not within space-shuttle distance.

Once you accept that you're on your own, the party must determine the secrets of this alien base while avoiding such trivialities as starvation, dehydration and just plain old accidental death. After you get the hang of the area and receive help from an E.T. ghost/tour-guide, you begin to realize that, while the place seems abandoned, it once served a purpose of galactic import—and if you can just figure things out, not only might you find a way to get home, you may just change the path of humanity itself. Of course, things are never straightforward, and along the way you discover that your companions



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Design: Sean Clark with Steven Spielberg
Publisher: LucasArts
San Rafael, CA
(800) 985-8227
Reader Service: #326

may have different ideas on how to do things and what's important to the species.

DIAMONDS FROM THE SCUMM

While it may surprise those who were expecting some sort of technological leap after waiting so long for the game to cook, this is your basic LucasArts adventure game, using yet another refinement of their traditional SCUMM engine. So right here, if you value live action over actual gameplay or writing, then this is probably not your cup of pap. For the rest of us, the ones who didn't regret the lack of video for a moment in *FHII: THROAT* or *SAM N' MAX*, this game is a step into the realm of art.

Very little has been done with the inter-

face; it's your basic pick up object/talk to people/glowing cursor over hot-spots kind of game, and I, for one, am glad they did not waste time fixing something that wasn't broken. *THE DIC*'s technical team did spend time on gameplay backgrounds and sounds. It's a mistake to dismiss these details as mere chrome while rummaging around for "the real game." *THE DIC*'s special effects and sound are exquisite and do more to draw you into the story than any live-video game I have seen recently.

RIPPING THE ENVELOPE

The real power behind *THE DIC* is the writing and story. Instead of seeing the various alien artifacts and messages as

simply game clues and puzzles, each lends itself into a whole that leaves you wanting to know more than you require to simply finish the game. Characterization is not terribly original, but it is strong and largely realistic . . . and that's the real problem with this game: the clash between realism and the mechanics of an adventure game.

The writing and setting gives the player such a high

expectation of realism that when an adventurism appears, it's like a slap in the face with a wet smurf. At one point, you need help to force open a door. Now, the feisty reporter is only a few hundred yards away, working on some alien consoles, and she is perfectly able to make it over to you and help out—but she insanely refuses to help, because "the answer" to "the puzzle" is to resurrect a dead man! Is it just me, or does using the power of a God to get something done, instead of just yelling "Quit being such a &*& and give me a hand!" seem slightly excessive and

grossly unrealistic?

In fact, the interaction between you and your two crewmates is touted as a strength, but it actually weakens the game. Going through it solo would have actually enhanced the experience, by not slamming you against character motivations and conversations that reflect game mechanics instead of the story.

The heightened realism of the story also clashes with the puzzles themselves, mostly because of the preconceptions built by playing more traditional adventure games. Most experienced gamers are used to a "cold, warm, hot" response when we work with an adventure puzzle. If you are on the right track, even if you haven't done everything you need to do, there should be some visual or sound hint that you are getting warm. This admittedly unrealistic convention is lacking in many of the more complex problems in this game, and they are much more difficult to solve because of it. Gamers should beware of abandoning a seemingly right idea just because there is no result at all—tweak your plan a bit and try again.

SHOW ME THE WAY TO GO HOME...

In the final analysis *THE DIC* is really a well-executed, challenging game that uses plot and detail to bring out the best from an aging game engine. While it isn't the longest adventure game I've ever played, there are plenty of wonderfully crafted locations and the player is in no danger of the *FHII: THROAT* "great fun for an afternoon" problem. I doubt many gamers will be claiming they did not get their money's worth here.

APPEAL: Anyone who loves a good, challenging sci-fi story and doesn't require the latest in SVGA graphics and live-action video.

PROS: The game not only goes to the stars but shows the direction that adventure games, animated or live-action, need to go.

CONS: Dated graphics and engine, and sometimes the well-told story and the adventure game elements clash.



➤ **SCRAPING THE SCUMM** LucasArts' interface, though dated, is still one of the best ways to get around in an adventure game.

face; it's your basic pick up object/talk to people/glowing cursor over hot-spots kind of game, and I, for one, am glad they did not waste time fixing something that wasn't broken. *THE DIC*'s technical team did spend time on gameplay backgrounds and sounds. It's a mistake to dismiss these details as mere chrome while rummaging around for "the real game." *THE DIC*'s special effects and sound are exquisite and do more to draw you into the story than any live-video game I have seen recently.

The planet and ancient base are drawn



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After eradication all the fireball-splitting mps, malevolent manetubs and truculent Cacodemons from the pixelized corridors of DOOM II—for the umpteenth time—what does a dedicated Doomster do for kicks? If you happen to work at an office equipped with a network and a posse of 486 machines, you can round up some co-workers and deathmatch the day away. Unfortunately, this option has its share of problems, most notably the shrills of rage certain to emerge from the network administrator's cubicle as the LAN slows to a lurching crawl, driven to its knees by your virtual bloodsport. Modem play is another option, but once you've lasted a four-play-

er network free-for-all, nothing else quite cuts it...until now.

If you have a modem and a credit card, DWANGO (short for Dial-up Wide Area Network Gaming Operation) could be your ticket to multiplayer gaming salvation. DWANGO's menu of supported games currently reads like a fast-food menu for action aficionados, with games like DOOM, DOOM II, THE ULTIMATE DOOM, HERETIC, HEXEN, TERMINAL, VERTIGO, MECHWARRIOR 2, TKEWAR and WHACKAWAN being available for play.

If you live near a DWANGO server (there are currently close to 30, located in major metropolitan areas across the United States) you can dial in with a local call. If you're not blessed with such close proximity, you'll have to spend extra change on long distance phone service.

Becoming a DWANGO subscriber will cost you \$7.95 for five hours of game time each month, with additional hours costing extra.

fans of all game genres.

►Web Watch: Dave Taylor of id software recently co-founded Crack dot Com, a new game company specializing in PC games. Crack's first release is Abuse, a hot shareware side-scroller with a built-in level editor. To get abused, check out Abuse at <http://www.crack.com>.

►The same programming team that crafted Apogee's RISE OF THE TRIAD is hard at work on yet another 3-D action game.

continue on page 138 ►►►

►DWANGO is hard at work adding even more games to their online service. Nothing is written in stone yet, but gamers may soon be given the opportunity to play EF2000 (Digital Image Design), AL UNSER JR. (Mindscape), COMMAND & CONQUER (Westwood) and MICROSOFT GOLF online via DWANGO. Time will indeed tell if these games make a showing on DWANGO; regardless, the company is obviously determined to provide multiplayer options to



In order to give DWANGO a good trial run, I logged on to the Denver server with a nondescript user name (to hide my affiliation with Computer Gaming). The first area I came across was the chat area, a no-charge "room" that DWANGO players use to organize games and boast about their exploits. A user by the name of "Cleaner" was kind enough to show me the ropes, inviting me into a game of THE ULTIMATE DOOM. As a big-shot game reviewer-type, I assumed that I knew my way around a BIG-9000 as well as the next guy. Big mistake. Over the next 30 minutes, I was given a harsh lesson in utter humiliation—the name "Cleaner" was certainly an apt moniker for my opponent.

After all the experience I've had with modem, serial and network games, I expected more hiccups and glitches than I encountered. DWANGO, in fact, performed flawlessly—in a four-player deathmatch that lasted nearly an hour, I wasn't booted off the server for a bad data packet, spurious line noise or any other system glitch. I also encountered a good mix of player skill levels at the Denver server, including DWANGO neophytes like myself, and players like "Jeepster," a college student from Ft. Collins, Colorado. Matching players of similar dif-

DWANGO
performed
flawlessly in
a four-player
deathmatch
that lasted
nearly an
hour.

>>>continued from page 137

Dubbed PREY, the new game posits that nasty alien critters from space have nabbed you from Earth and are forcing you to fight for their amusement. The storyline sounds like a cross between SPARTACUS and PREDATOR, but the most important feature will be the "true 3-D" game engine. Look for PREY in '96. Until then, you can check out the 3-D Realms homepage at <http://www.apogee1.com>.

current level. As I emerged to find out why I'd been abandoned, I was addressed with such witty bits of typed dialogue as "hahahaha" and "Just Fue'in' with ya!" Needless to say, finding a sportsman-like team of gamers to face off against can be as important as choosing which game to play.

Bad apples in the gaming pool notwithstanding, DWANGO delivers admirably

skill levels is fairly easy, as each player is given a rating that reflects how skilled they are.

Newbies beware—DWANGO has the potential to be a bit harsh on novices, as I discovered when I entered a game of DOOM II with two guys named "Paradox" and "Nails." After a few minutes of play, they abruptly exited the game and entered the chat area, leaving me stranded within the

as a multiplayer gaming system. The current emphasis on action games, according to DWANGO President Robert Huntley, is just the first part of a transitory phase

COMING 'ROUND THE MOUNTAIN

DWANGO may be king of the multiplayer gaming mountain now, but challengers to the throne lurk around every



A HEX ON YOU No network? No problem—you can play multiplayer HEXEN on DWANGO's dial-up service.

toward supporting even more games. "We're looking at six genres of games that we'd like to support," Huntley says. "Our vision for DWANGO is as a fully-featured gaming service that's not just action and shoot 'em up games, but as one that will support any sort of game we can put on it."

corner. Companies like the Imagination Network, MPC-Net and the Concentric Network—while a bit long in the tooth technologically—are still waiting in the wings for a front-runner like DWANGO to stumble. Huntley attributes part of DWANGO's success to their bottom-up approach to network design and their pro-

CG TIPS!

Mortal Kombat 3 Cheat Codes

If you're getting pounded into pate

trying to best Shao Kahn and his gang
of goons, try out these cheat codes for MORTAL KOMBAT 3. At the DOS

prompt, enter the codes after you type in "MK3" (without quotes). Here's an example: MK3 9966

This will force the game into backwards mode, with all the fighters facing away from each other.

Got it? Here are a few more:

MK3 1111	Fighters are miniaturized and float
MK3 603015	Combat is in slow motion
MK3 12345	The fighters are stretched, making them taller
MK3 54321	Fighters are miniaturized
MK3 8888	Fighters are expanded, making them dumpy
MK3 8000	Enters turbo combat mode
MK3 1995	Invisible Kombo
MK3 831	Your fighters turn invisible
MK3 1000000	Enables Shao Kahn and Motaro (In two-player mode only)

VS Battle Codes

These codes can only be entered on the VS BATTLE screen. You'll also

need to refer to your MK3 instruction manual (pages 17-18) on how to implement them.

6-4-2-4-6-8	Loads and plays Ga ga, then the game ends
2-0-5-2-0-5	Victor of round one battles Smoke for one round
0 3-3-5-6-4	Victor of round one battles Shao Kahn for one round
9-5-8-1-4-1	Victor of round one battles Motaro for one round
7 6-9-3-4-2	Victor of round one battles Noob Saibot for one round
9-7-8-2-4-3	Shortens combat
3-4-8-2-7-9	No timer
9-7-2-2-7-9	No timer
4 6 0 4 6 4	Random combat
1-0-0-1-0-0	Disables throwing
2-3-9-4-9-4	Disables sweeping
0 2 0 0 2 0	Disables blocking
9-8-7-1-2-3	Eliminates power bars
0-3-3-0 0 0	Handicaps player 1
0 0 0 0 3 3	Handicaps player 2
3-3-4-0-0-0	Player 1 takes half damage from hits
0 0 0 3-3-4	Player 2 takes half damage from hits
5-5-2-2-5-5	Both players take double damage from hits
3-3-4-4-3-3	Both players take half damage from hits



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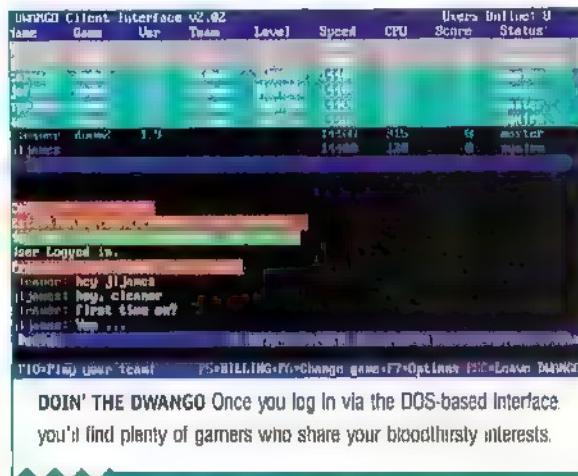
of the LucasArts adventure

With its rich Wagnerian-

orchestral score, THE DIG

is a must have for fans of

the game.



DOIN' THE DWANGO Once you log in via the DOS-based interface, you'll find plenty of gamers who share your bloodthirsty interests.

proprietary routing technology, which gives them the bandwidth to support graphically-intensive action games like DOOM. Network goliaths such as America Online, Prodigy and CompuServe may tower over DWANGO in size, but Huntley easily shrugs that off; DWANGO's concentration is on games and games only. "We have a very narrow

focus on what we offer content-wise. It's about games, and that's it."

The biggest challenge may arise from the Total

Entertainment Network (TEN), a new game network set to debut in early '96.

Another potential rival is Papirus, who is hard at work on their own multiplayer racing game network. But

DWANGO isn't standing still; it recently added support for the Windows 95

DirectPlay application programming interface (API), a step that will give Windows 95 gamers one-click access to DWANGO and simplify connection headaches. Huntley also predicts that DWANGO will have 150 access nodes by mid-1997. They aren't for getting Macintosh users, either; a Mac version should be available by the middle of 1996.

ANGLE OF THE DWANGO

DWANGO still has some rough edges; the service is currently server-specific, so if you call and register at one server location, you'll be unable to use the same account information on another dial-up location. As mentioned previously, chat areas are unmonitored, so parents may want to serve as chaperones for younger gamers. Some of these problems can be evaded with any new on-line service, and DWANGO is no exception.

Regardless, one thing is certain: Huntley and Company have developed the multiplayer network of choice for Doom fans, and are planning to aggressively expand into new markets, both in terms of new dial-up locations and support for even more games. You'll undoubtedly be hearing more from DWANGO in the near future. For more information and a free copy of the DWANGO connection software, check out the DWANGO web site at <http://www.dwango.com>.

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Circle Reader Service #178

Combat Unlimited

TERRA NOVA Makes Final Preparations To Blow Open 3-D Gaming

by George Jones

Most software developers would love for their product to be described as "The Thinking Man's DOOM." But the game designers at Looking Glass Technologies aren't happy with that description of their newest game, *TERRA NOVA: STRIKE FORCE CENTAURI*. Game Constructor Art Mitu will tell you, quite seriously, "We do not want to be described as that. Our product is much, much more."

And they're right. As much as we all like to define product in terms of other products, *TERRA NOVA* defies this sort of description (not that there's *anything* wrong with DOOM). But I'll try anyway. How about *X-COM: WARRIOR 2* mixed with



HEDGING EVIL *TERRA NOVA*'s full-screen view maximizes the action, but still provides vital statistics at the top of the screen.

one *Nikola ap Io*, leader of Strike Force Centauri, an elite armor-clad assault force with a track record of getting the job done. Your task is to drive the forces of a corrupt Earth—multitudes of pirates and totalitarian Hegemony forces—out of your clan's newly-formed slice of the pie

Outnumbered as you may be, you've got two things going for you: your Power Battle Armor (PBA)—the most sophisticated assault-wear for its time—and your finely-trained squadron.

Advance through the missions, which vary in their objectives and difficulty, and you'll gain more sophisticated weaponry along the way. Win it all and you'll be a hero.

THEIR'S NO "I" IN "TEAM"

TERRA NOVA looks good—what else would you expect from Looking Glass—and plays great, but it's the presence of small-squadron tactics that kicks this title up to the next level. The designers have gone one step farther than keystroke com-



THE 'A' TEAM The ability to command your squadron members sets *TERRA NOVA* apart from the pack; it's a simple matter of pointing and clicking.

real-time X-COM with a splash of DOOM? (Sorry, Art.)

FIRMA TERRA

The setting is the 23rd century. You are

mands such as "attack my target" and "retreat." In *TERRA NOVA* you'll be able to draw out specific missions for individual members of your squad (who have different strengths and weaknesses) by clicking on their icon and creating waypoints, issuing offensive or defensive commands each step of the way.

This simple addition completely changes the scale of the game. In one mission, for example, you're charged with taking out a supply caravan driving a canyon route toward a bridge. In most games you'd have to move toward the enemy and engage them in order to get your team into the battle. In *TERRA NOVA*, however, we were able to give two troopers orders to flank the enemy and one trooper orders to engage from above; we took out the bridge to halt their progress.

During the course of a battle you can also order squad members into various modes, like berserk, advance and retreat. It was nice to give the retreat order in the heat of battle and see soldiers not just turn

tail and run, but cautiously back up, firing if the opportunity presented itself. Keystroke commands like "Follow me" and "Help!" will also be in the game.

Of course, having squad mates is of no use if they have crummy artificial intelligence or if you can dominate battles without their help. Looking Glass promises this will not be the case. "You will not be able to win missions all by yourself, and you won't be able to win missions by simply ordering your team around," Min says. And while your partners' AI is still undergoing tweaks (so is the enemy logic), the designers promise intelligent gameplay all around.

One feature we did not see is autonomous artificial intelligence. Your troopers will follow you if you give them the appropriate order, but hopefully there won't be times when they sit twiddling their thumbs, unable to think for themselves, while you get the last beat out of you 10 clicks away, all because you forgot to give the appropriate command. Given Looking Glass' devotion to TERRA NOVA, it's not likely.

And while it might be hard to control your men as finely as a first person, real-time X-COM squaddie, it's not completely out of the question for superb tacticians. I'm not really sure you'd want to, though.

THE EYES AND EARS HAVE IT

Stellar visuals and whirling 3-D sound can't hurt, of course. Thankfully, Looking Glass is going all in out in both

directions. TERRA NOVA's graphics looks good in low-res (320 x 200) and mighty fine in high-resolution (320 x 400). The texture-mapped environment is about as close as you can get to true 3-D; canyon depths, lakes, hills and mountains are accurately portrayed on each of the four planets you'll fight. This is not the FUTUR UNLIMITED ENGINE—it's better.

The game defaults to first person point-of-view with helmet and full-screen views, but you'll probably be able to switch to a couple of other perspectives like Chase view.

Q-Sound 3-D Audio will be integrated into the TERRA NOVA's whirling, mood-setting sound track.

SCORCHED EARTH

Gameplay promises to be nothing less than superb. Immersive Reality is this game's ultimate goal, and TERRA NOVA succeeds remarkably. "Subtlety's great, but we want things to happen that the player will notice," Min says. Between the intense firefights and the voices ringing out warnings, updates and panic attacks from your team, there's lots to notice. One trench battle on the Ice World transported us to what looked like the Hoth battle at the beginning of *The Empire Strikes Back*. Laser fire streaked the combatants, while smoke and destruction packed the confined area. Through much effort, the designers have managed to capture what appears to be a real flow of battle. My only concern is that at times,

there may be too much going on, overloading the action.

The controls are sophisticated, yet intuitive. Games used to first-person, 3-D action will feel right at home; the keyboard controls your movement and the mouse controls your

weapons. This control scheme is nice because you can fire at objects that aren't right in front of you. You can also look up and down, and check your sides and your flank. Joysticks will also be supported, although the design team thinks the mouse will be the preferred controls. "We want the interface to do what you expect it to."

Network play, unfortunately, will not be included—we'll have to wait for TERRA NOVA 2(?) for that.

ICING ON THE CAKE

The expected may apply to the controls, but there's plenty of unexpected "icing on the cake" kind of stuff. Full-motion video sets the real-life tone of the game. You can handpick team members based on their skills before each mission.

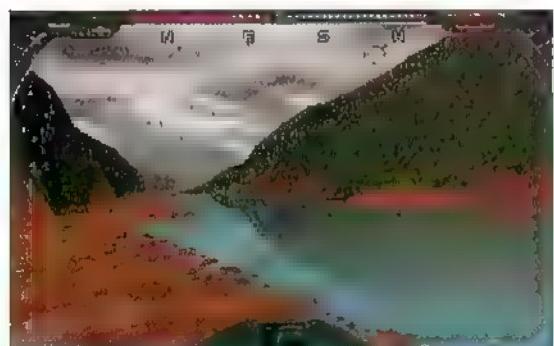


DON'T FLAME ME! One of your teammates slow roasting the enemy.

Drones can be used to scout out enemy territory and (eventually) destroy targets. Jump Jets can be attached to squaddies to give them greater mobility, and special weapons, like the railgun, can permanently destroy enemy armor. With extra details like these, it's easy to tell that this is one game that is being designed by gamers.

TERRA NOVA appears to be one of those rare games that, long after you've been impressed with the graphics and heart-pounding action, will continue to draw you in. There's that much depth, particularly with the future possibility of expansion packs.

"Thinking man's Doom" indeed.



RIVER CRUISE With the fast and furious action, you might not notice the breathtaking beauty of the surrounding landscape.



That Swarm Fuzzy Feeling

THE HIVE Packs A Nice Little Sting

by Mark Clarkson

Call me a purist, but I've always felt that PC games and console games are two different creatures. Arcade and console machines are supposed to offer dazzling graphics, blinding speed, and non-stop action. PC games, on the other hand, are supposed to offer depth. Trinmark's new shooter, *The Hive*, crosses that line, attempting to bring state-of-the-art, console-style arcade action to the PC. And I must admit, it does a pretty darned good job... provided you've got the hardware to run the game. *The Hive* is a cornucopia of twitch-and-fire action that will give both your nerves and trigger-finger a serious workout. There are 20 levels of arcade action and the story, involving bioweapons and genetically engineered super-insects, moves along nicely as you move from one to the next.

The Hive offers two basic flavors of action. First is the rail-running shoot-em-up, familiar to players of *REBEL ASSAULT*, *CHAOS CONTROL*, and *CYBERIA*. You have no control over your movement, direction or speed. Baddies pop into view or zoom around in front of you to peel off a few shots with their blasters before they disappear from the game forever.

The second type of action sequence is best described as "the standing in place and spinning in circles" variety. These panoramic missions are my favorites. Even though the baddies appear predictably, you're so busy whirling around,



► RAID! Knock bugs dead in the air and on the ground in *The Hive*

scanning the horizon that you soon lose all track of where they're going to be coming from next.

SAVE ME FROM DOING THIS AGAIN!

One of the big frustrations with these types of games is that if you die at the very end of a level, it's back to the beginning. In one early segment, for instance, you must defeat wave after wave of blaster-spewing fighters with nothing but a handgun. Survive, and the action gives way to a cut scene of ice shattering beneath your feet, and you falling into the frozen caverns below. Suddenly, your point of view jerks and spins to reveal a bad guy standing in the doorway. You've got a split second to put the cursor on him and squeeze off a shot before he kills you dead. If you miss—which I did, time and time again—you've got to repeat the entire five-minute segment.

I also found the "cinematic" cut scenes of my ship rocketing through the air annoying and distracting after the first couple of run-throughs.

BLAM! BLAM! OINK!

Be warned: *The Hive* is a serious resource hog. On a 486/66 with a fast VRAM #3C3NF Pro video card and a 4X CD-ROM, the game is playable, but very jerky, even running in the far (320 x 200 x 256) video mode. The cursor lags and jumps while the baddies and the backgrounds stutter. An optimist might say that this simply makes the game more challenging, but...

PRETTY, PRETTY SHALLOW

The Hive is a pretty darn good game for its kind. Your freedom of motion may be limited, but the game looks great, the action draws you in and the music, which rises and falls in time with the action is excellent, further enhancing the mood of the game.



► If the action is a little too fierce for you, try the patch on our web site (<http://www.cnet.com/gaming/>) or in Game Publishers Forum B (go gampub) on CompuServe.

APPEAL: The beginner or intermediate gamer who wants to see fast shoot-em-up action and pretty backdrops without worrying much about depth or strategy.

PROS: Lovely 3D modeling, non-stop arcade action and a very well-done, motion picture quality soundtrack.

CONS: Scratch the surface of this game and you won't find much underneath.



Price: \$59.99

System Requirements: IBM compatible 486-66 or better (Pentium recommended), 8 MB RAM (16 recommended), Windows 95, 2x CD-ROM drive, mouse; supports most Windows compatible sound cards

Protection: None (CD must be in drive to play)

Designer: Rainbow

America

Publisher: Trinmark
Santa Monica, CA
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Wet Behind the Ears

WETLANDS Is A Liquid Gaming Diet

by Mark Clarkson

With its hand-drawn heavy metal cel art and gritty, wonderfully realized 3-D world, *WETLANDS* had me excited from the get-go. The animation sequences are well-directed, and the camera work is imaginative. The voice acting is at least as good as Saturday morning cartoons. This is the kind of game you hope and pray you'll like.

Unfortunately, this simply ain't the case with *WETLANDS*. For all its charm and potential, it fails to deliver. Welcome to the world of one-dimensional gaming.

MISSION TO WETLANDS

You are John Cole, mercenary and bounty hunter—sort of a *Johnny Quest* gone bad. Gruff and gravelly-voiced, he sports a permanent five-o'clock shadow, a really wicked uppercut and Elvis' *Jailhouse Rock* hands. Cole clomps unsafely through the game in heavy engineer boots, his long black duster swirling about his legs.

You've been hired to find an escaped prisoner, Dr. Philip Nahj, and return him to custody. Nahj is the inventor of the bomb that laid waste to Earth's ecosystem, transforming it into an ocean planet with 98% of its surface covered with water and 95% of its population dead.

TARGET PRACTICE ON RAILS

When the transport shuttling you to Wetlands comes under attack, you're asked to fill in on the forward turret in what becomes the game's first action

sequence. As rendered spaceships buzz around the screen, your job is to target them with the cursor, using either joystick or mouse, and click away. You don't steer and you can't switch weapons. Pretty simple stuff, but I figured this was simply *an hors d'oeuvre* to warm me up for the real game.

As I moved from one locale to another, from outer space to undersea city to seedy bar, I kept wanting for *WETLANDS* to introduce some adventure game elements, to allow me to choose where to go, or what to say, or to search for clues to Nahj's whereabouts. But no—the cut scenes may be beautifully done, but they remain steadfastly non-interactive.

And, as one action sequence after another unfolded, it became clear that all I was going to be asked to do was put the cursor over the bad guys and shoot them.

I was expecting either an adventure game with action elements or an action game with a plot wrapped around it. *WETLANDS* is neither. Instead, it's a short animated movie with some vanilla target-shooting sequences grafted on.

In some missions your location remains fixed, and you can slide the view a few degrees to the left or right; in others you have no control whatsoever. The fly-throughs of hallways, tunnels and undersea landscapes are pretty, but they're pre-rendered and therefore always play exactly the same way. Your point of view pitches up, down, left and right, sometimes even flipping upside down, but none of it's under your control. Many sequences are effectively impossible until you've memo-



CLICK AND PLAY Gameplay in *WETLANDS* is largely a point and click affair

rized the particular bob and weave with which you're being propelled through them, as well as the order in which the various bogies appear on-screen.

OVER PRODUCTION VALUES

I've seen many an overproduced computer game in my career, but I have a hard time remembering a game with so much production wrapped around so very little game. Other than pointing and shooting, the only interaction in this title involves choosing your route through pseudo-mazes that make up some of the tunnel-based action sequences.

I can't decide whether *WETLANDS* is a failed *WING COMMANDER* rip-off, or the first entry in a new "non-interactive movie plus arcade shooter" game genre. I found it disappointing, all the more so because it looks so darned good. ☐

APPEAL: Fans of arcade-style shooters like *Chaos Control* and *Rebel Assault*, or anyone desperate for some gritty sci-fi action might want to give this one a look. But it's not for you if you don't like target shooting.

PROS: Gorgeous 3-D rendering, good animation, dramatic direction, good voice acting.

CONS: The game element is sorely lacking.



Price: \$54.99

System Requirements: IBM compatible 486-66 or better, 8 MB RAM, local bus video, 2x CD-ROM drive, mouse, supports most SoundBlaster compatible sound cards

Protection: None (CD must be in drive)

Designer: John Philip

Sousa

Publisher: New World Computing
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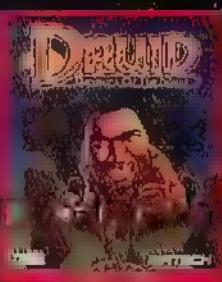
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Circle Reader Service #182



Darth Drops In For A Quickie

REBEL ASSAULT II Boasts Flashy Star Wars Footage, And Lasts About As Long As The Movie

by Shane Mooney

Star Wars was as big and grand as the Death Star itself. With more special effects than you could shake a light saber at, it took films to the next level. Yes, it had its downside, namely the mediocre acting, predictable dialogue ("I got a funny feeling about this"), and simplistic plot. But it packed several years worth of eye candy and incredible cinematography.

Similar sentiments can be echoed when it comes to *Rebel Assault II*. The special effects are nothing short of mind-blowing and the video segments seamlessly integrate with gameplay that is actually fairly enjoyable, although a bit restricted. Yes, there is a downside, namely the mediocre acting, predictable dialogue ("I got a funny feeling about this") and simplistic plot. And much like its big screen counterpart, it packs several hundred megabytes of eye candy into two unfortunately short hours of gameplay.

THE IMPERIAL TIES THAT BIND, SHOOT AND DESTROY

REBEL ASSAULT II is divided into 15 chapters, each featuring its own objectives and one of three types of action. Ground combat pits you against Stormtroopers (who still can't hit the broad side of a spaceport). Cockpit action sends you into space, where you'll run into "wombat's nests" of "Imperial bucketheads" and use your cursor to destroy them. In the flight maneuvering sequences, you have to duck and dodge obstacles while driving Speeder Bikes, Tie Fighters and even a Corellian Transport (similar to the

Millennium Falcon, except that everything works).

But before you space-slim fans start warming your afterburners, let me remind you that this is not a slim in any way, shape or form. It's an arcade-action game, which means that your freedom of motion is severely limited. In fact, in most ground and cockpit sequences, you have no control over your ship at all.

Unfortunately, just like the original *REBEL ASSAULT*, the controls are as touchy as a disgruntled Wookie. I had to switch from my Microsoft Sidewinder to a Logitech Wingman for a little more resistance in my joystick so I wouldn't become a permanent part of the landscape. Thankfully, on the easier settings, red arrows indicating which way you should steer slash on the screen approximately 0.2 seconds before you hit something.

REBEL WITHOUT A CLUE

One nice touch is the Difficulty Editor, which lets you actually adjust how many enemies you'll have, how much damage you can take and all sorts of other options.

Unfortunately, no matter how easy or hard you make *REBEL ASSAULT II*, you can't make the game any longer. Veteran gamers will probably plow through it in less than five hours, and novices not much longer than that. Once I mastered



THE FALCON FLYETH *REBEL ASSAULT II* will dazzle you with cinematics and special effects, put you in the cockpit of the Millennium Falcon, and end all too soon.

it, I could go from opening credits to the grand finale in an hour and 20 minutes, which is less time than it takes me to sit through the original Star Wars movie.

Note that this is the first original Star Wars footage that George Lucas has allowed in ages, so those who can't wait until 1997 for the Force to be with them in the next big screen installment might find that this offers just the dose they need.

APPEAL: Action gamers willing to sacrifice extended gameplay for cool graphics, great special effects and that old Star Wars magic.

PROS: Impressive film footage, enjoyable gameplay, and an authentic Star Wars look and feel. Difficulty Editor is a nice touch.

CONS: Short gameplay, and the sensitive controls make getting through some chapters as tough as mentally undressing Princess Leia with a blast helmet on.



Price: \$54.95

System Requirements:
IBM compatible 486 50 MHz, 8 MB RAM, DOS 8.0 or higher, 1 MB hard drive space, 2x CD-ROM drive

Number of Players: 1
Protection: None (CD-ROM must be in drive)

Designer: Vince Lee
Publisher: LucasArts
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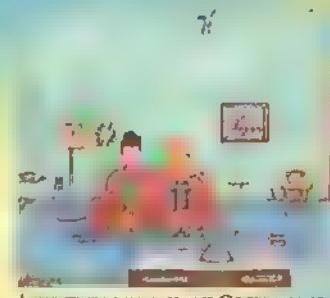
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Hexing Hexen

How To Become A HEXEN Hero In Three Painful Steps

by Hank Leukart

Silly mortal. You just had to have Raven's new 3-D game, didn't you? Despite repeated warnings from loved ones, employees and parents, you had to buy Hexen. And now look at you. Drooling, stuttering, pathetic fool. You had no idea what you were getting into. This is not the mindless death-and-destruction experience Doom was. This is something entirely different, and now you, like many others, are stuck right smack dab in the middle of it. Silly human—your type never learns.

Fans of 3-D games who didn't hesitate in picking up Hexen may have been pleasantly surprised to find that it differs significantly from most other 3-D titles. The action is still there, but a whole new level of depth and difficulty has been added.

There are five episodes of Hexen and an epilogue, each with a funky blend of puzzles and hazards, some of which are easily worthy of a good role-playing game. For those of you who are having some trouble getting through it all, here's a partial walkthrough.

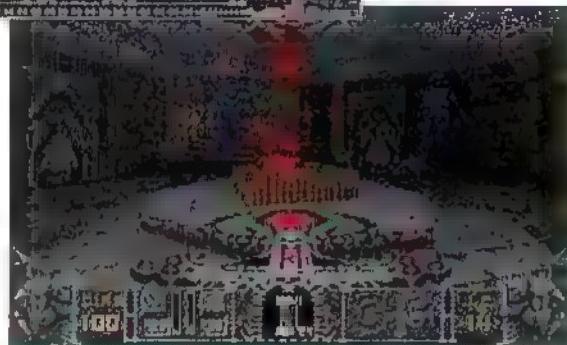
Note: In order to be as efficient as possible, I've avoided using the "M" word (as in monster). I'm confident you'll know what to do with them when you find them.



SEVEN PORTALS

The first episode of Hexen Seven Portals, essentially entails two "levels": The Winnowing Hall and The Seven Portals. All you have to do in the first level is ring a bell, while the second requires a little more thinking. Let's go.

Winnowing Hall: In The Winnowing Hall, the primary goal is to ring the bell in the bell tower to the south. This can be fairly easily accomplished in three steps. First, you need to find the Emerald Key. Break the stained-glass windows in the chapel, one has a passage behind it that leads to a switch. Hit this switch and a pillar in the center of the chapel will lower to reveal the key. Use the Emerald Key to open the green door. You'll find a switch on the other side of the door. Push it and



▶ **FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS** Ring the bell to open the portal in the center of the chapel in Winnowing Hall.

head over to the tower in the south. Once you get there, a switch will rise from the floor that will open a door in the bell tower courtyard. Grab the key in here, open the door to the bell tower, climb up to the top and ring the bell. This will open the teleporter in the chapel that will bring you to The Seven Portals.

The Seven Portals: The Seven Portals consists of seven gates, which I'll refer to in clockwise order, starting with the one on your left. Each gate leads to an individual sub-level. You'll have to hit 'em all to finish. The first (and only) gate you can open is gate number 2, do this by flipping the switch on the pillar near it. Kill those annoying serpents, grab the flask, and hop into the portal that rises up. This leads to the Guardian of Ice. Head for the far room and pull the switch there. This will cause four pillars to rise and fall, revealing a white arrow. Step on the lowered pillar



▶ **MORTAL PORTAL** You'll need to hit switches in all seven of these portals.

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the arrow is pointing to (and no other one, unless you want to become a hero crepe) and you'll be transported back to the main level. Ready to enter the other six gates?

Notice that two new gates have opened up in the main area—enter the



► **FIREMASK WITH ME** Grab the Fire Mask; you'll need it to get the Fire Key.

first one on the left, step into the portal and prepare to meet the Guardian of Fire. In this sub-level, enter the doorway on the right (as you enter) and walk into the room filled with lava. Hit the switch in this room (this is one of three you must activate to open the sixth gate). Now go to the room with the lava pillar and grab the Flame Mask on your left (you need it to get the Fire Key). Return through the portal back into the main chamber.

I head for the third gate on the left to face the Guardian of Steel. In here, you'll find two doors. Enter the open door, hit the switch there (the second of three), and go back and enter the other door. Here is the third switch. Hit it and you'll open the sixth gate.

Once you've gone through the sixth gate, you will need to locate the Fire Key and Steel Key. These can be found in the two doors visible after moving through the ice at the beginning of the gate.

To get the Fire Key, go into the door on the right. Place the Flame Mask on the wall on the far end of the room (it's pretty obvious where it goes). A pillar will lower with the Fire Key on it. To get the Steel Key, enter the door on the left. A switch will appear in a corner of the room. Pull it and bightend it into the next room (watch out for holes in the ground!), where you'll see the key resting atop a ledge. Grab the key and get the hell out of there—at times you'll have to

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Once you have the keys, you'll notice that two of the three remaining gates have been opened. Use the Fire Key to open the door inside of the first gate. You'll have to make your way through a maze—it's not too difficult—until you find the teleporter, which will send you back to the entry chamber. Enter the other opened gate—use the Steel Key to get past the door here—and go back to the main room again after pulling the two switches.

You will now notice three sets of stairs, each of which leads to three switches. Pull each switch, and the final gate will be opened. Go inside, kill all the monsters, gobble up all the goodies, take a deep breath and get ready for more!

SHADOW WOOD

To solve the puzzles in the area beyond the final gate, you'll need the Horn, Swamp and Cave Keys. The basic idea is to find the Hypostyle by reading six panels in the Shadow Wood temple. Each panel corresponds to a puzzle switch in the episode that must be activated.

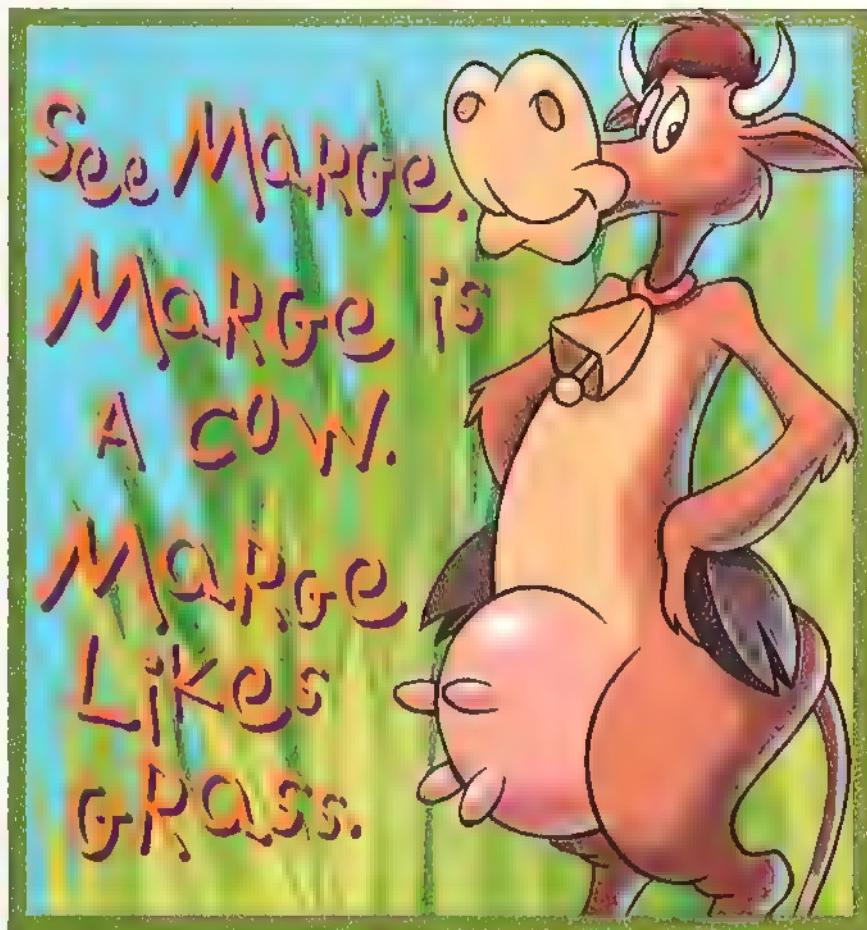
To find the temple and check out the six panels, follow wall on your left, go through the doorway on your left and up the stairs. To enter the temple (are you really worthy), turn right and walk to the end of the corridor. There's a secret door



► TEMPLE OF DOOM Here's the temple in Shadow Woods; come here after you finish triggering the six panels.

in the metal wall on your left. Pop in there and you'll soon come upon a room with the six panels and the gate you need to leave. As you solve each puzzle, one of the panels lights up.

You need to find three keys—Horn, Swamp and Cave—to get to the six switches.



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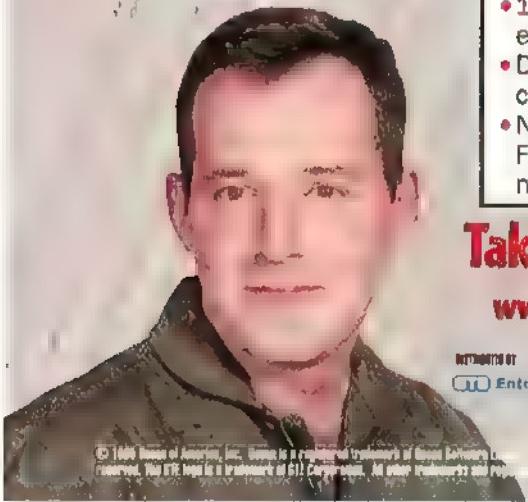
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The Horn Key can be found in the Wastelands, which you can get to by jumping across a sequence of steep ledges near the river (careful!) until you find a switch to hit. After this, jump back. A doorway should have been revealed that will lead you to the Wastelands.

The Swamp Key can be found by walking down the river until you get to the swamp. Hit the switch on the tower, then the one on the wall, walk back up the stairs, and jump onto the pillars (watch out for poison darts!). Hit the switch you find here and a portal will open near the swamp below. Go through the portal, flip the two switches in the adjoining corridors, and go back out to the swamp. Now hit the switch on the building's "porch," do your best gator impersonation by flowing with the swamp current, and hit the switch on the castle. Go into the castle, jump into the water well, and hit that switch. Finally, jump out of the well and grab the Castle Key (it's by that building's porch). Run back into the castle, climb the tower, hit the hidden switch (behind some of the decorations), and go down into the castle's lower level. You'll find a dining room with a fireplace in it. Open the fireplace and hit the switch in the corridor, which will lower you down to the Swamp Key (whew!). Grab it, but be careful of the poison darts!

The Cave Key, thankfully is a little easier to find. Head for the Caves of Circe found through the north passage near the temple (back near the beginning of the level). Running through this passage will raise steps in the front room and allow you to run into a crevice to the right at the top of the stairs. Jump into the hole in center of the room and pull this switch (stick of switches yet?), which will reveal yet another flight of stairs. Make your way down and follow the ledge on the right of the room. Finally, the Caves of Circe! Jump into the large hole with the flying bats, take the corridor on the left, then the corridor on the right — the one with the large crevice in the ceiling. Follow this corridor, and you will soon have the Cave Key in your grubby little hands.

THE OLD SWITCHEROO

After getting these keys, you'll be able to activate the six puzzle switches, needed for opening the Hypostyle portal.

Two of the switches require the Horn Key. The first can be found behind that fireplace in the dining room; the other is in the cave with the crevice in the ceiling (check out the Caves of Circé).

The Cave Key also allows you to hit puzzle switches in the castle courtyard and in the Wastelands—it's right at the exit, in the room with the two portals.

Finally, the Swamp Key allows you to flip a switch in the Caves of Circé (found on the way to the Cave Key—look for a passage that goes upwards) and one in the Wastelands (found by using the tunnel opposite to the one you use to get the Horn Key).

EXIT, STAGE RIGHT

Upon throwing all six puzzle switches, go back to the temple and go through the center gate, which should now be open and hop into the portal, which will take you to the Hypostyle. You're almost done!

In the center of the Hypostyle you'll find a four-pointed star, one of the points of which is raised. Go in the direction of the arrow points and you'll enter the Serpent Room, the Centaur Room, the Lava

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► **STRAIGHT AS AN ARROW** Use the arrow to escape the Guardians of Ice; all you have to do is hop onto the appropriate pillar and you're outta there.

Room, and the Bridge Room, not necessarily in that order. Note that the order these rooms are opened is random every time; make sure you follow where the star points.

In the Serpent Room, you must activate the switch at the far end of the room. In the Centaur Room, the switch is behind the wall on the left side. In the Lava Room (containing pillars on a lava

flow) fight the Death Wyvern, and he's not in a very good mood. This guy is tough with a capital T. After destroying him (yeah, right), make your way through the southwest portal in the Hypostyle room. This will finally lead to episode three. From here, you're on your own.

CONTINUING THE SAGA

You might have gathered, Hexen is



► **A SENSE OF STYLE** The Hypostyle is your pointer to freedom; go in the direction of the raised arrow.

lake), the switch is at the end of the room—you can get there by using the steps or by jumping from pillar to pillar. In the Bridge Room, press the switch on your left as you enter, then look to the right. There will be a symbol on the floor. Remember it. Cross the Bridge and hit the panel with this symbol on it to get out of this room. To avoid getting hit by some

a BIG garage, way too big for one article. But we did find a great walkthrough resource on the Web. U.S. Leah has created a spectacular guide to beating Hexen. ☺

**ON-
LINE**

► You can find a full Hexen walkthrough at: <http://www.eco.net/~argp/levels/hexen.html>

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Puzzle Me This

So Many Conundrums, So Little Time

I've been a puzzle nut since I worked my first crossword at the tender age of five. Likewise with classic board and parlor games; I even had a pocket checkers set stashed in my Major Matt Mason lunch box. I fondly remember suffering from "Rubik's Thumb," holding my bruised tendons high with honor. All of which makes me wonder why can't these experiences be faithfully re-created on my computer? Face it, the computer version of Risk was about as challenging as playing my 6-year-old niece, and Trivial Pursuit was too lame to even be trivial. Sure, chess games are a cut above the rest, but in recent years, they've become so tough that the AI threatens to leave behind anyone below expert level. And I challenge you to name one puzzle game,

other than *Tetris*, which has kept you awake nights like *Panzer General*, *Ultima IV* or *Wing Commander III*.

Things are finally improving, however—hence this column and new magazine section, which every month will clue you to what's hot in the broad category of



MORE THAN JUST A PRETTY FACE The Puzzle Shop of INFINITE RECURSION has brains as well as beauty.

CHECK!

► It seems that Mindscape has castled long with CHESSMASTER 5000. The main reason for the delay (now due in April '96) is not any problem with the award-winning engine. Rather, modem/Internet play is being tweaked. Also, the database has been expanded by Grandmaster consultant Viswanathan Anand to include the latest in chess games and theory—it reportedly runs over twice as fast as before. In the meantime, CM 4000 has been revamped for Win 95, with crisper graphics and quicker number-crunching

(if not pawn-grabbing). Win 3.1 CM 4000 users who wish to upgrade for \$14.95 + S&H should contact Mindscape at 800-234-3088.

► Soon after you read this, PERFECT PARTNER POKER will be available from Positronic. Like their PERFECT PARTNER BRIDGE, POKER will actually learn your style of play after several hands, making it a tougher opponent. Most of the popular Vegas-style games, such as Texas Hold 'Em, are available. Looks like Amarillo Slim finally has some competition.



Classics & Puzzles. For example, Alexey Pajitnov insists that he will eventually out-do his own *Tetris*. While that lofty goal may be a stretch, his KNIGHT MOVES (see review in this section) does show promise. QQP tries to resurrect that old *Sorcerer's Journey* magic with CARD PLAYER'S PARADISE (reviewed next issue) showcasing Rummy, Pinochle, Bezyque and Casino. And of course, the chess wars continue, with some half-dozen titles expected in '96, led by CHESSMASTER 5000 and Interplay's USCF CHESS—supposedly including mid-range levels that normal people can play and enjoy.

PURE PUZZLE POWER

Still, the neatest game I've seen lately is a well-guarded secret by, of all people, Oracle—probably the last company anyone would expect to do a compelling game. The PUZZLE SHOP OF INFINITE RECURSION, however, (tentatively planned to ship this summer) does its name proud. The stunning backdrops are Arabic-inspired structures—appropriate, since the Arabs invented zero and gave us

“ How my computer cured my case of Rubik's Thumb and taught me to love SVGA chess games. ”

an excuse to think of nothing—but they are merely window-dressing. The puzzles here are the main attraction.

And what puzzles! The games are mathematical in nature, and winning hinges on recognizing a pattern, either geometric, algebraic, or numeric. Learning about fractals, perspective, and the like is fun rather than tedious when it's Koch's Snowflake you are making. Who

cares if you're really dealing with a set of points in a complex plane? One of the tougher games has you figuring how to construct the Golden Circle with no tools other than a compass and straightedge. My favorite game has you pulling 1-4 fish at a time from a pond against a tough computer opponent, trying to be the last to pull a fish. Sounds simple, and it is, once you recognize the pattern; mean-

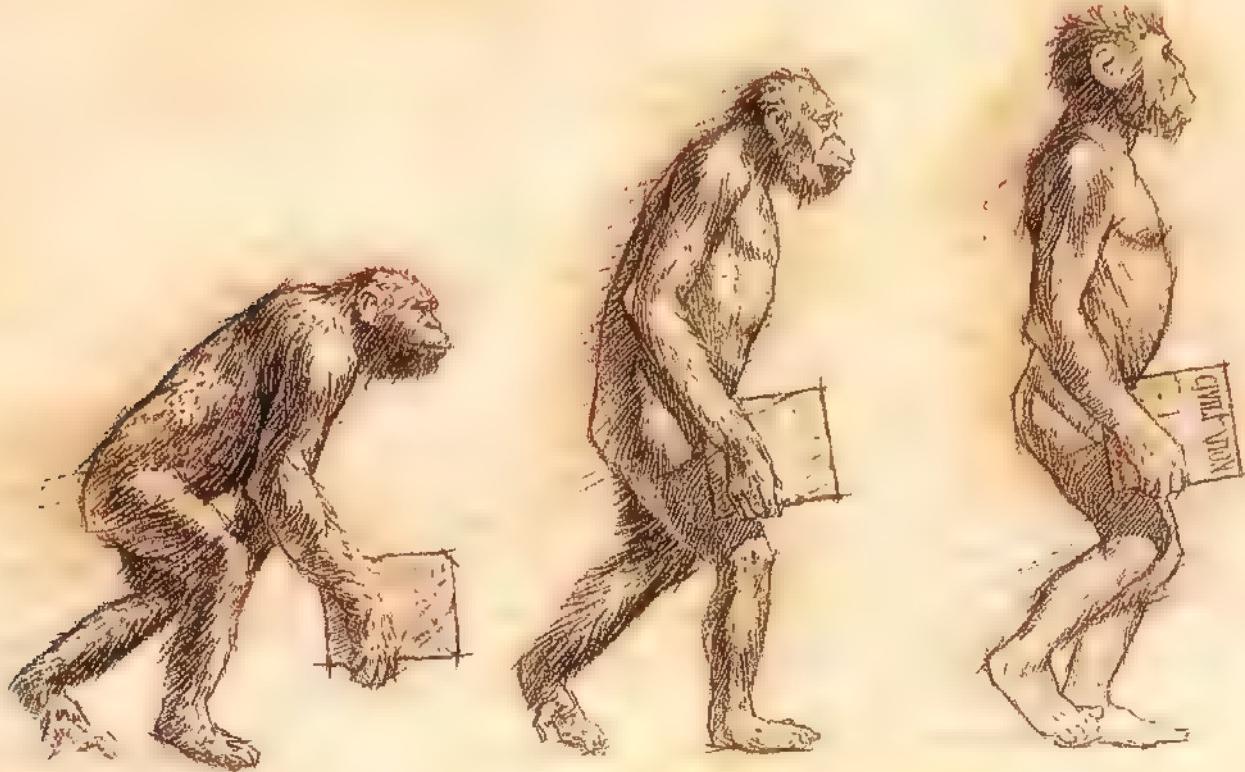
while, it's just frustrating enough to be fun, like any good puzzle.

Far beyond the tepid boundaries of what normally constitutes "edutainment," *The Puzzle Shop* is a game which can teach while it entertains, addictive enough to bring you back for more math and logic puzzles than you ever thought you could stand. If only calculus class had been like this. ■



DISPERSING MYSTS There's no plot to get in the way of the puzzle-solving in *The Puzzle Shop*.

THE EVOLUTION OF CIVILIZATION



CTIPS!

► I hear from a lot of decent chess players who get frustrated playing CHESSMASTER 4000. Try this for a challenging, but more balanced game: get the computer opponent into a modern opening, such as the Center Counter Gambit. After Black's Queen (CM 4000) takes your center Pawn, go to the options screen and turn off the opening library. You'll still get lively play but you won't be playing against Grandmaster moves. After learning some openings—by experience, not memorization—you can go back to boarding the dragon in his den.

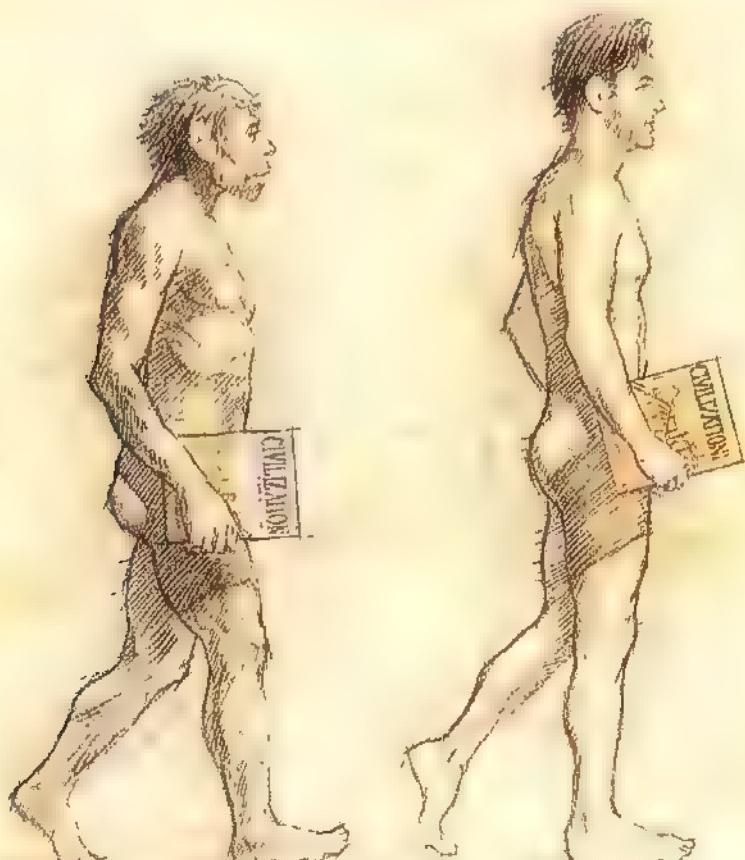
► It isn't really chess, but Alexey Pajitnov's new puzzle game, Knight Moves, does abide by one chess principle: you can only move like a Knight to reach your goal on each level. The old

chess principle "Knight on the rim—prospects look dim" doesn't apply here. The best plan of attack when the center is blocked is to move to the side of the

board, then "retreat" to the back rank. This allows you to redeploy slightly off-center and save time, rather than taking a more circuitous route.



CLIPPED WINGS Turning the AI's move library off after Q x P makes for a more "natural" game.



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Pop Goes The Culture



Berkeley Systems' Spirited, Sarcastic Sendup Of TV Game Shows

by Charles Ardai

Go ahead, try and tell me you don't know who Monty Hall is. If you're of a certain age, you may not remember our fourteenth president or what states border Oklahoma, but you certainly remember the host of "Let's Make A Deal." Chances are you also remember Bob Barker, Wink Martindale and phrases like "Come on down!" Face it, we all grew up on TV game shows. Some of us can still hum the jingles from commercials for products that haven't been made since 1974.

Sure, there are pale computer versions of "The Joker's Wild" and "Wheel of Fortune," but no one plays them. No, what we've needed is a game that takes this semi-sacred cow of American pop culture and makes burger patties of it. And boy do we get it in *You Don't Know Jack*, a diamond-sharp satire of every game show you ever watched. It's all there, from the incontinence of the host to the smarminess of the music and the pressure-molded look of the screen. Everything is "tutu Wasted to a high gloss, right down to the closing credits, which include dead-on skewerings of cereal and toy commercials. ("I'm Chocky the Squirrel! Get my chocolatey Num-Nut Bits! Under 18, make sure your parents aren't home before calling.")

You are a contestant on a trivia show, "buzzing in" when you know the answer to a question. Games run for either seven or twenty-one questions, and can be played either solo or against other human players.

First, you have to pick a category, from the sublime ("Frothy and Leftiology,"

"Smutties and '70s Music") to the ridiculous ("Lenny & Squiggy International"). Next, a question is read out loud along with four possible answers. The first player to buzz in gets first crack at answering; the first one to answer correctly collects the money associated with the question.

There are some extra gameplay bits—for instance, you can force another player to answer a tough question by buzzing in and then using the "Screw Your Neighbor" option—but the real fun here is the questions themselves.

If you choose the category "Ugly Women," the host asks, "What open actuallly ends with a fat lady singing?" I hit a "Gibberish Question" and you might have to identify the familiar commercial tag-line that rhymes with "Wrong, the muff core the van. What paid? You a toe-man." (Think Secret anti-perspirant.) Get to the last question, and in the endgame sequence called "Jack Attack" you might be called upon to remember that Istanbul used to be Constantinople, and Kellogg's Sugar Smacks used to be simply "Smacks."

IN THE KNOW

You Don't Know Jack may displease those who don't enjoy giggly frat-house amuendo, either out of prudishness or maturity. (What does a "rubber" go on in England? Answer: a pencil; it's the British word for "eraser.")

Which of the following headlines could be attached to a factually correct tabloid story about Hamlet?

- Dead Mother Delivers Baby!
- Exercise at Castle Doesn't Work!
- Ghost of My Father Told Me to Kill!
- I'm Impregnated by an Alien!

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POP-TART CULTURE: Knowing your Shakespeare avails you little unless you have a firm grounding in 70's breakfast cereals and other kitsch culture.

I, however, just love giggly frat-house amuendo and laughed myself sick playing this game. All the game show spoofs "Saturday Night Live" has ever run and all the hipper-than-thou game shows MTV has concocted wish they were this good. Uh-uh. This is the real thing; they don't know Jack.

APPEAL: Anyone who's ever watched TV sitcoms and game shows or OD'd on Saturday morning cartoons while eating Sugar Smacks will have a whale of a time.

PROS: A brazen, sarcastic, delicious satire, crammed full of good bits from beginning to end. Impeccable writing and the visual wit you expect from the publishers of *After Dark*.

CONS: Some of the incidental material gets repeated from game to game, and you get tired of sitting through it again and again.



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Monopoly Comes To Life

Stroll On The Boardwalk Via The Internet With This Faithful Adaptation Of The Boardgaming Classic

by Arinn Dembo

I recently asked some gaming veterans what their first "real" game was. Was it Clue? Life? Some variant on the old Sorry! game? No, the majority were pretty sure it was Monopoly. Ah, nostalgia! I started playing Monopoly when I was six, when the rules changed every time my older brother wasn't winning. My personal victory condition was to get the coolest playing piece. Until I was ten, I never played long enough for anyone to go bankrupt—I always thought the winner was the person who had the most cards by the time you had to eat dinner.

The fun of the game was never the mechanics, but the personalities of the players, each decision expressing some personal quirk or goofy master plan. And personality is exactly what was lacking in previous computer Monopoly games—monotonous AIs, with hotseat the only way to play against other humans—it made you want to break out the board game and save the hard drive space.

This new version of MONOPOLY, however, does the old American boardgame classic proud. Some of the computer opponents are annoyingly unpredictable. They can even be made to mimic human behavior patterns, from how it rates property, to how often it offers to trade, to how much money it keeps in the till.

But this MONOPOLY was really designed for human-to-human play, with not only hotseat, but network and Internet competition. Westwood has set up a waiting room for the game, which can be easily accessed once you establish your usual

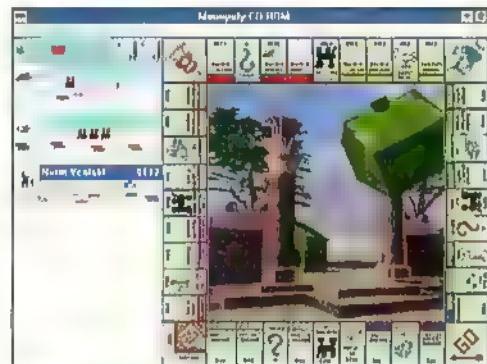
Internet connection. In theory, Monopoly enthusiasts should be able to access the waiting room any time and find human opponents dialing in from all over North America and Europe. The support structure is there for social gaming, complete with Chat and "whisper" features during the game.

AN EMBARRASSMENT OF RICHES

All the improvements are great, but the average gamer might well ask, "Is that it?" Gameplay still consists of rolling the dice, moving around the board, buying real estate and trading with other players for properties, cards, cash and rent immunity.

On the other hand, MONOPOLY now sports creative and appealing animation for the movement of the playing pieces: the Top Hat flies across the board, flapping its brim like a manta ray; the Shoe hops, skips, twirls and jumps from square to square, the Battleship sails, etc.—all very keen. There are even special graphics for landing on each property, some of which are really exquisite. I particularly liked the way Rich Uncle Moneybags would pick up the playing pieces and shake money out of them whenever you had to pay a fine. There are also sound effects and some forgettable MIDI music (which you can turn off).

The program installs and runs beautifully from a Windows 95 operating system. Virtually every common variation on the rules can be used, including impossibil-



THERE GOES THE NEIGHBORHOOD: MONOPOLY CD-ROM keeps gameplay virtually social with effective hotseat, network, and Internet functions.

ties like unlimited houses and hotels. The on-line Help is very thorough and covers virtually every aspect of the game, including the details of creating your own AIs and using the game on the Internet.

Overall, MONOPOLY CD-ROM is a big improvement over previous versions, and is definitely the best available version of the game for your PC. It offers several hours of light entertainment to the solitary gamer and a welcome opportunity for social gamers. ■

APPEAL: Should be well-received by any who love the board game and by anyone with a taste for the old classics.

PROS: It really is Monopoly. Cool animation, the ability to build your own AI players; networking and Internet play are a big plus.

CONS: It really is Monopoly...and may not be exciting enough for those weaned on modern computer games.

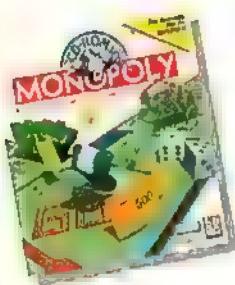


Price: \$39.95

System Requirements: PC compatible 486-33 or better, Windows 3.1 or Win 95, 8 MB RAM, VGA graphics, 10 MB hard drive space, 2x CD-ROM, Sound Blaster compatible sound, mouse.

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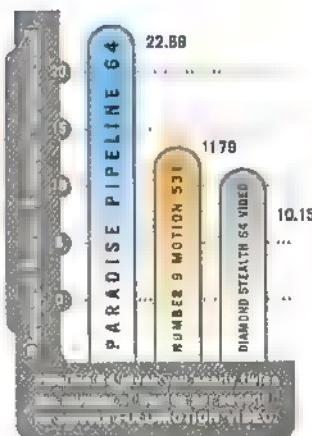
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A Knight's Errand

Challenges And Frustration In A Castle Full Of Puzzles

by Elliott Chin

Knight Moves isn't a household name, his masterpiece *Tetris* certainly is. Like millions of others, I've been seduced for untold hours by its addictive challenges. *KNIGHT MOVES*, Alexey's latest creation for Spectrum HoloByte, is original, and rather challenging, but it just isn't the same as its venerable grandfather. In *KNIGHT MOVES* an evil wizard has set up shop in a ten-story castle, littering it with traps and monsters. What this amounts to is simply 60 levels of puzzles, into and through which you must guide a jumping knight.

There are ten levels to this game with six "matches" to each level. Each match is played on a chessboard, upon which are scattered coins, swords, and a single exit portal. The object of each match is to collect all the coins and swords on the chessboard without getting killed, and then move onto the exit portal so you can descend to the next level. Moving around a chessboard of squares to collect coins might seem easy enough, but there is one catch: You are a knight, and as such, can only move in the traditional chess pattern, which is two squares forward and one square sideways.

CASTLING SIDE-TO-SIDE

To make things more challenging, as you descend deeper into the castle, the chessboards start changing. In the first level, the chessboard is completely open, but in later levels certain squares are covered up, limiting your field of movement.

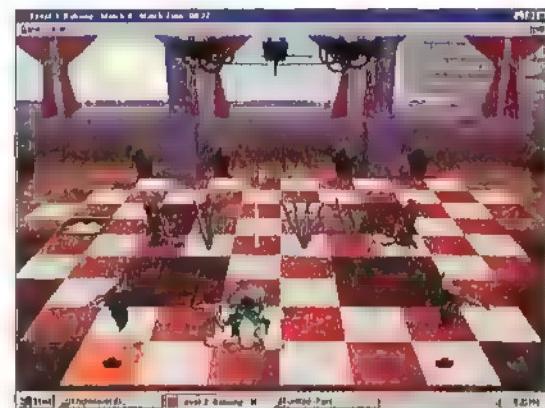
Another obstacle in your path is death, which can come in several forms: the roaming monsters which kill with a mere touch; harmful squares of lava or slime

created by certain types of monsters; and finally, your own missteps. Jumping onto the same square twice turns it into lava, and jumping onto it a third time means death. Thankfully, harmful squares, created both by yourself and by monsters, return to their normal state after a few seconds.

Although monsters can destroy you, you have no direct means to eliminate them. You may, however, burn them indirectly with a lava square of your own creation. The trick, though, is to create the square just as they are walking onto it, but before they touch you. Eliminating your enemies gives you greater freedom to maneuver, but involves great timing and risk.

You can also collect power-ups to aid you in your matches. Some will open up closed squares, while others will temporarily stop the monsters or give you immunity to lava squares. These power-ups don't appear that often, but are great boons when they do.

KNIGHT MOVES can be very frustrating at times because you can't pause in mid-game to survey the board and plan your moves. Once you click the mouse button to make your first jump, you can never stop. And if you try to plan your jumps before you make your first move, the clock keeps ticking and monsters will start homing in on you. Aside from being frus-



DROP DEAD Wandering monsters, deadly squares, and your own missteps could turn you into a pile of loose armor before you can reach your goal

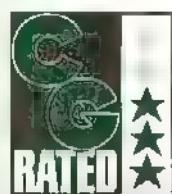
tating at times, the other drawback is that the levels get repetitive after the seventh or eighth level. There is no save game, but *Knight Moves* does let you restart the game at the last match you played.

Despite these few problems, *Knight Moves* still provides some excitement and challenge for those who want to make a quick diversion into the Wizard's Castle. Just don't expect it to replace *Tetris* on your hard drive.

PAPPEAL: This game is ideal for those people who just want to wile away a few hours with a challenging puzzle game.

PROS: An original concept, challenging puzzles and good graphics make *Knight Moves* a fun diversion.

CONS: The puzzles are repetitive, and the non-stop movement can make planning your moves frustrating.



Price: \$26.99

System Requirements:
IBM compatible 486 66 or better, 8 MB RAM

SVGA graphics, less than 1 MB hard drive space, 2x CD-ROM drive, Win 95, mouse,

supports Windows compatible sound cards

of Players: 1

Protection: None (CD must be in drive)

Designer: Alexey

Pajitnov

Publisher: Spectrum HoloByte
Alameda, CA
(800) 879-PLAY
(619) 693-1200

Reader Service #328

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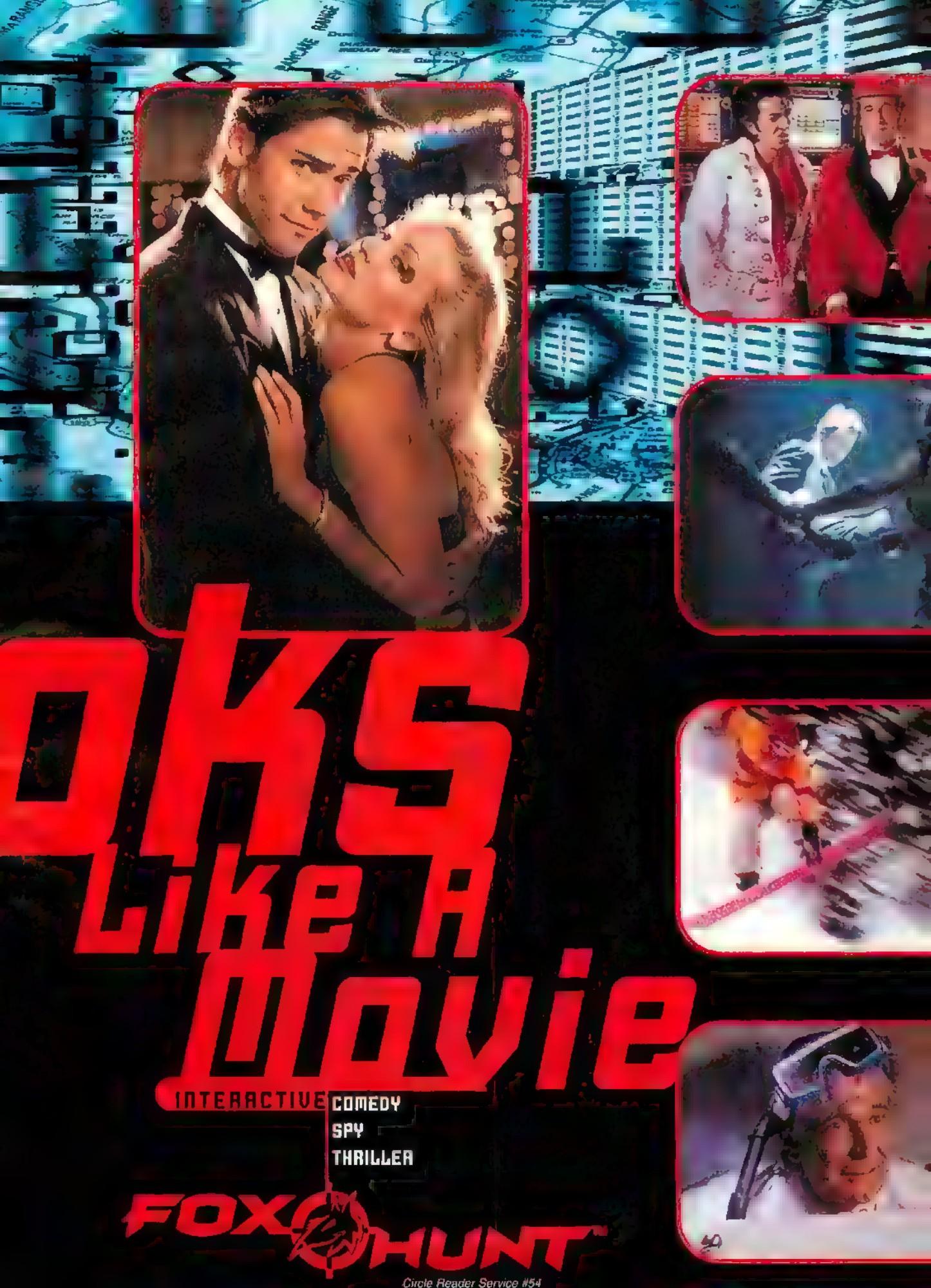
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when they're all broken like that."

"I didn't think a ball could fit there!"

"Help him up."



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The Silicon Sidelines

If You Want To Know About Sports,
You've Got To Play The Game



first-time experiences rarely get much better than this one. Fourth row seats, center ice, San Jose Sharks vs Ottawa Senators (okay, so the teams could have been better).

Hog dog in my left hand, ice cold suds in a nifty cup holder on my right. It was what I call a "positive experience."

Midway through the game, however, I had a moment. You know, one of those frightful time-stopping instances where you realize something startlingly obvious about yourself. Midway through the second period, as I found myself cheering for the Sharks, who were successfully killing a power play, a friend asked how I knew so much about hockey. I stammered for a bit before I blurted the truth. "Computer games."

►The Dynamix-Sierra group is hard at work on their next baseball installment, FRONT PAGE SPORTS BASEBALL Pro 96. Promising stunning high-res graphics, tons of AI tweaks and significantly quicker autoplay, this Win 95 game should be a significant improvement over last year's version. Watch for it in late spring.

►LINKS Pro is the working title for Access Software's upgrade to their wildly popular computer golf title. Scaled to the Pentium crowd, we expect Access to work their usual graphical magic, although the greens are a little more crowded this year, with several quality golf titles in the

But the fear didn't come then. It came afterwards, as I started to catalogue the rest of the major sports with which I am familiar. Basketball I know (though some of my coaches may disagree), having played it for far too long, so I'm in the clear there. Football, well, as much as I'd like to say I learned it from watching television, there's only so much John Madden can teach you with his overused telesimulator; and although my college roommates played and taught me more than I ever wanted to know about pulling linemen and how to read defenses, that transfer of knowledge usually took place during sessions of PLAYMAKER FOOTBALL and JOHN MADDEN FOOTBALL. Baseball, golf and hockey I'd know absolutely nothing about if it weren't for electronic entertainment.

I know I'm not unique — I'm sure there are tons of gamers out there who, like me, don't have the patience to watch 10 hours of sports programming every weekend. And to be perfectly honest, I think it's great. I would never have learned what



ice was, or the intricacies of a power play had I not played Artwork's INTERNATIONAL HOCKEY (a marvelous sim) for the Commodore 64 or Electronic Arts' NHL HOCKEY. Sure neither perfectly recreates the game, but ice rinks are pretty rare in Inglewood, California. ...

The same goes for baseball. The only reason I know who Warren Spahn is, or that Bob Gibson was one hell of a pitcher for the St. Louis Cardinals, is because of sublogic's PC RE-STAT BASEBALL, again for the C-64, which helped me make it through one viciously hot summer in the middle of L.A. It still amazes me that I can "talk baseball" largely due to that game. Jeez, I hope those programmers knew what they were doing.

My point is twofold. First, computer (and video) games are opening up worlds of sports to kids and adults everywhere. NHL HOCKEY, for example, is played by kids in the inner city, who might never see a game live as well as by kids in New England states. The same goes for all the other sports games. Second, in addition to teaching us the rules of the game and who the talented players are, sports sims give us insights into how to play the game.

So when you find yourself explaining why a play action pass is a good idea on 2nd down and 6, or why Ollie

"PC and video games are opening up worlds of sports to kids and adults everywhere."



works.

►GTE also has an NCAA title in the works. NCAA CHAMPIONSHIP BASKETBALL, scheduled for March, will put players in the coach's shoes. One feature we're anxious to check out is the career mode, in which players age and graduate, with younger players stepping in to fill their shoes.

Nixon stole second with two outs, ask yourself how you know that. You might be amazed.

While on the subject of real-life sports, I had a rather eerie experience recently coaching my Oakland Raiders squad in FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL '96 (Sierra). The Raiders, as usual, have been one of the more frustrating teams in the NFL this season. Inconsistency, penalties and poor play have been their bane all year. So when the latest version of FPSF

rolled into the office, I quickly seized it, intending to rewrite a frustrating chapter in Raider history — at least for 1995-96.

Wrong. I just finished one of the most frustrating electronic seasons ever. All year long, my Raiders were plagued by — you guessed it — erratic play, injuries and penalties, penalties, penalties. The defense worked well, the offense sputtered, and I was lucky to drag my team into the playoffs with a 10-6 record (sound familiar?), at which point we quickly lost to the Buffalo Bills in the first round amidst freezing cold weather. I was up 14-

3, but the turning point came late in the 3rd quarter. Jeff Hostetter, my quarterback, was sacked (for the 5th time) and fumbled the ball, and the Bills scored on a one yard run after a really dumb defensive pass interference penalty on James Tapp. And then they scored again. All in a day's work for the Raiders ... damn.

For the gridiron low-down, stay tuned for next month's reviews of FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL '96 and UNNECESSARY ROUGHNESS '96. We'll do all we can to make sure you don't pick a bad game, but it's up to you to pick a winning team. ■



► Tony Keren's Ultimate Utilities for Tony La Russa 3 are a complete set of powerful tools for sorting statistics, editing players and changing schedules. To check out the shareware version, go into CompuServe's Sports Gamers' Forum

(GO CIS-SPRTS/MS) and download the UTIL7.ZIP file from the BASEBALL library, or check the Computer Gaming web site at (<http://www.zdnet.com/~garn.ng>). Note: STORMFRONT is not connected with the Ultimate Utilities toolset. ► Hoops fans should check out Lutz Van Hassel's NBA Live Rookie Patch, which includes rosters updated through early

November, and some bonus players like Michael Jordan, Beavis and his two-on-two partner Butthead. To download, go into CompuServe's Sports Gamers' Forum (GO CIS-SPRTSIMS) and download the NBAPV302 ZIP file from the basketball library, or check the Computer Gaming web site. Note: Electronic Arts does not support the use of this patch.

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GRAVIS



Fishful Thinking

Sierra's TROPHY BASS Delivers 'Reel' Tournament Bass Fishing To The PC

by Kevin Turner

I used to think that bass fishing was a rather simple "six-pack and po boys" kind of affair, at least until I was formally introduced to the sport by my girlfriend. The first time she took me out on the lake, I realized I was in trouble. This is a complicated affair—the number of lures available is amazing, and the methodology of selecting these lures borders on art. And real fisherman call it a fishing rod, not a fishing pole. Watch ESPN on a Saturday morning and you'll know what I mean.

Bass fishing is a serious sport and a big business. It has a professional circuit that uses specially-designed bass fishing boats, equipped with digital fish finders and continuously recirculating freshwater holding tanks. The sport's pros have sponsors, and oftentimes bass fishing is their sole occupation.

Sierra's Trophy Bass accords the sport its due respect. Simply put, it is the complete package for the virtual bass fisherman, boasting tons of information and some surprisingly nifty gameplay.

WHERE DO YOU

WANNA GO?

From the game's main menu, you can choose to go fishing, learn more about fishing or learn how to play the game via the "preview" option, which is a walk-through. Although the on-line preview is good, the lack of a print manual is an unfortunate omission.

When you're ready to go fishin', you have more options to consider. You can

fish a lake, enter a tournament or embark on a pro bass fishing career. There are five lakes available: Lake Lanier (Georgia), Lake Murray (South Carolina), High Rock Lake (North Carolina), Sam Rayburn Reservoir (Texas), and Lake of the Ozarks (Missouri). Three difficulty levels makes it easy to learn and challenging as you improve, but the easy level is

important, because they provide the player with hints as to the type of pattern to follow.

Once you've digested the lake's vital statistics, check out the large map that's provided. This map can be viewed either photographically or topographically. Using your knowledge of the weather conditions and your ever-growing sense of bass behavior, pick a likely spot on the lake. The map zooms in on the small area you have chosen, and you can fine tune location using the depth finder. Once you're all set up, press the "go fishing" button.

PUT A GRANDADDY ON MY HOOK

Once settled in to the bow, you're ready to fish. You can choose what you want to fish with from a wide variety of rods, reels, fishing line, lures and live bait. There is even a setting for the drag on the reel. Also within reach are buttons that add scent to the lure or ask for advice. If you want to troll, there's a trolling motor for moving small distances at a time.

Casting is a simple affair. Simply pick a spot where you'd like to pitch your lure and click the "cast" button. Accuracy and distance of the cast depends on the type of casting method selected—two-handed, pitching, and so on. To reel the line in, hold down the left mouse button.

Likewise, when a fish strikes, hold down the left mouse button to reel that baby in. Of course, it's not really that simple. Fighting a big fish can take a while—you have to be patient when bringing them in or you'll lose the battle. To the uninitiated, it's amazing how many factors are



FISH ON! When a fish bites, you'll know it via the Strike! graphic; from that point on it's a winner-take-all battle.

only available during non-competitive trips.

To fish in a more leisurely, non-pressure filled environment, the electronic angler need only select a lake and a level of difficulty. Once the lake is selected, the conditions of the lake are given. Conditions are



Price: \$54.99

System Requirements: BM compatible 486 66 or better, 8 MB RAM, SVGA graphics, 2x CD-ROM drive, Windows 3.1 or Windows 95, mouse, supports Windows compatible sound cards.

Protection: None (CD must be in drive)

Designer: Randy Dersham

Publisher: Sierra Bellevue, WA (800) 757-7707

Reader Service: #338

it can't be reasoned with,
it can't be bargained with...
...and it absolutely will not stop.

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PC-ZONE

"The more I play *Future Shock*, the more I continue to amaze me. It's really quite incredible. I'd expect it to run very slowly considering the amount of graphic detail and amount of on-screen polygons, but it screams!" — NEW TYPE GAMING

If you don't believe our statement, that *Terminator Future Shock* heralds a new age of 3D games surpassing all the existing ones, then try out the demo. But you were warned! — SCORE

"Look for Bethesda Softworks to have competitors running scared in the near future." — Computer Game Review



BETHESDA SOFTWARE INC.

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involved in catching virtual fish.

And speaking of virtual fish, the bass in this game are for all intents and purposes, real; you can actually see their squirming little shadows in the water, which can make casting in the right places a little easier.

So what are some of the advantages of virtual fishing over the real thing, besides getting your hands slimy and losing your wallet in the lake? Well for one, you've got what every angler dreams of: a bottomless tackle box. On the less realistic, but easier side, none of your lures will get hung up or lost, and you won't have to deal with untangling wads of spaghetti-like line.

These little advantages aside however, the real key to success in this game is learning about bass fishing. Thankfully, there's no need to hang out at the local fishing store looking for tips and no reason to hit the Web looking for references. All the information you need is contained on this CD-ROM. And there is a lot of information to wade through.

THE BIG LEAGUES

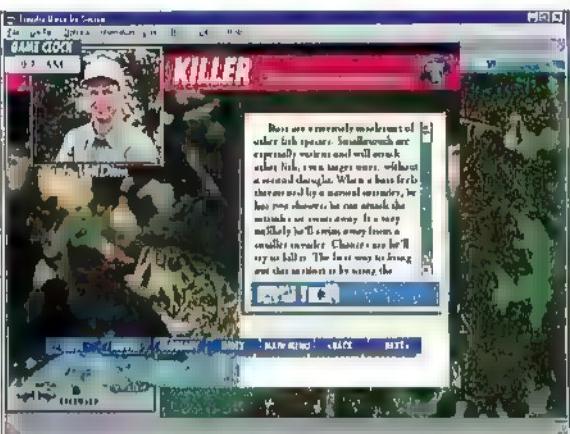
The tournament is the meat and potatoes event. A three-day fishing affair (a weigh-in at the end of each day) against the saltiest freshwater bass fisherman in

the country will test your bass knowledge and fishing skill. Time is a factor in these contests, since there is a substantial penal-

the fish-finding section to learn the most likely places to find bass in the fall.

The informational movies in this sec-

tion, slaming some very big names in the pro bass fishing world, are quite good, being both entertaining and helpful. I was especially pleased to see my hero, Denny Brauer, Larry Nixon, Kevin Van Dam and George Cochran also contribute their knowledge. In



FISH-OPEDIA There's a smorgasborg of fishy material on-line, most of which is informative, interesting and useful.

ty for weighing in late (being 15 minutes late for the weigh-in means forfeiting the day's catch).

The career option lets the player go through a miniature pro bass fishing season, culminating in a "World Series" of sorts. You start in a tournament at one of the five available lakes, and then proceed to three other lakes. Depending on how well you do at the end of the first four tournaments, you may be able to enter the Bass Master's Classic, held at the fifth lake.

BASS MASTERS

TROPHY BASS' "How To" section is impressive and complete. There is a section on finding fish that discusses variables such as weather, water, season and structure. There is a section on bass behavior and why they strike. There is a section on tackle, describing each lure and rig available and the best time to use each lure, and there is a section on fishing patterns, broken down by the four seasons of the year.

Say you're fishing in the fall. Using the drop-down menus, go to the "How To" section and read about the fall patterns. Perhaps you decide to try a big crankbait pattern. Go to the tackle section and learn about crankbaits, and then go into the section on bass behavior and learn why bass like crankbaits. Then you can go into

addition to widening the scope of the game, it also shows that the folks at Sierra did their homework.

WEIGH IN

TROPHY BASS is a wonderfully entertaining game for serious bass fishermen and those just interested in fishing. The action is wonderfully enjoyable and the "How To" section is outstanding. Furthermore, gameplay becomes an accurate gauge of how much you've learned. It just might help you in real life. It's no wonder that this game is endorsed by the Bass Anglers Sportsman's Society.

Even if your idea of fishing is going out to the garage, blowing the dust off the family fishing rig, and driving to the lake via K-Mart to buy hooks and sinkers, you'll still enjoy this game. TROPHY BASS, like real fishing, is much more than sitting around waiting for the big one. **6**

APPEAL: Anyone with a passing interest in fishing, or looking for an alternative sports game (besides golf) will love Trophy Bass.

PROS: Easy to use, fun fishing simulator with tons of options and some amazing fishing resources.

CONS: Lures can't get snagged in the brush, and there's no manual.



Bass Fishing Terms

Like all enthusiasts, bass fisherman have their own unique way of saying things...

- Jig and Pig: A skirted and weighted hook (the jig) with a pork skin trailer attached to the hook (the pig)
- Bank bangin': Patrolling up and down a bank in a bass boat, casting toward the bank.
- Finessin': Using light tackle and soft bait (usually plastic worms).
- Ooh son!: What to say when your partner hauls in a hawg.
- Hawg: A large bass.
- Used water: While fishing from the back of the bass boat, casting into water previously tested by the person in the front of the boat.
- Atoli: Whatever. As in, "I didn't catch any fish atoli."
- Stichin': Specialized hand retrieval technique used by hawg hunters.

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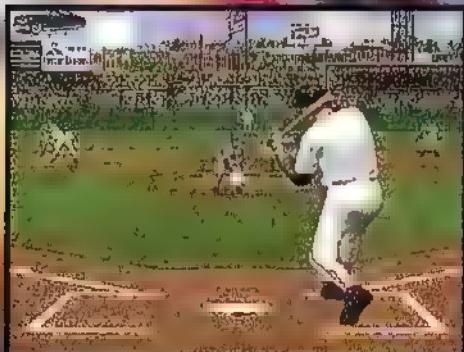
"the best baseball sim currently available"

Electronic Entertainment

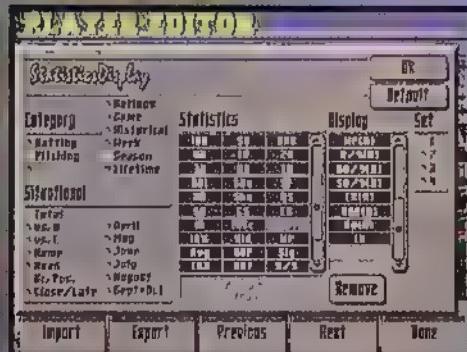


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PlayStation™



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It's that moment just after you rip it off,
'cause they don't know what hit 'em,
face like "Hey that's my arm!"...



SATURN

PLAYSTATION

WINDOWS 95

PC CD

when the circuits are still pumping
and they've got that expression on their
the first gush of oil from the open
socket...the lights in their eyes going
dim...yeah, that's when I know
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S I E R R A

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No More Flying Solo

AIR WARRIOR 2.0 Invades The Online Skies



In combat simulations just aren't that realistic. Despite the advent of striking 3-D, texture-mapped graphics, CD-quality sounds, and ultra-fast processors that can handle deadly-accurate flight models and challenging AI, there's still an element of predictability in air combat sims that gives the experience a mechanical, inhuman feel. Computer pilots just don't fly like the real thing.

ANDROID ACES

Certainly, the AI pilots are talented. But the average sim plane feels more like it's manned by Yul Brynner's automaton

ON THE RADAR

Dynamix is planning to shake the foundation of the sim world with RED BARON 2, a Win 95 game set for release sometime this summer. A new hi-res display engine brings unprecedented

detail to this sequel of the company's 1991 hit, while rich sound effects such as blaring air raid sirens as you dive on a town heighten

the immersion effect. Multiplayer support for at least eight, and



RED BARON II

perhaps 16, players should make for some exciting neighborhood battles. A dynamic campaign world, similar to that in EF2000, promises lots of targets of opportunity.

Dynamix isn't going to take another two-year flight sim breather after RB II ships, though. Also in the works is a Battle of Britain sim, to be followed by a jet fighter simulation sporting multiple high-performance planes.

The effect was amazing — as well as amazingly frustrating for some. Air

character from *WestWorld*: it pursues you with dogged determination, executes its maneuvers with flawless accuracy, and doesn't give up until it's blown to smithereens.

In real combat, the pilots you encounter aren't always going to pick the perfect counter-maneuver to your Immelman, and not all of them can stick to your tail like glue. Even the best pilots aren't likely to stick around in the fight if their engines are pouring out smoke and fuel is spewing out holes in their wings. Nope, they're going to turn tail and head for home, hoping to safely come back and finish the fight another day.

Certainly, there are difficulty levels in many games that cause pilots not to fly as well as they can, but the fact remains that so far no sim has succeeded in capturing the feel of real, human opponents.

That's where the multiplayer sim



comes in. If you've only flown against computer pilots, you only *think* you've experienced fun and excitement. Part of the thrill is the competitive game — knowing there's a real person whose day you're running with your superb flying skills. But what's really exciting is the unpredictable nature of a real human's flying; fleshy opponents don't always react the way you'd expect them to. There's also the camaraderie of flying with human teammates — although it can be fun to take out a target with computerized wingmen, you can't invite them out for a brewski later to celebrate and relive the victory.

WARRIORS OF A KIND

One of the first games to truly capture the excitement of multiplayer air combat was Kesma's Air Warrior. This multi-player, World War II air combat simulation first appeared on the GEnie online network. Players with PCs, Macs, Amigas, and Atari STs could download a front-end program that essentially amounted to a combination simple flight simulator and terminal program. You could practice flying (but not combat) offline, then log on and try your luck against real human pilots.

The effect was amazing — as well as amazingly frustrating for some. Air

"
you've only flown against computer pilots, you only think you've experienced fun and excitement."

"

STIPS!

You can simulate RC (radio control) in FLIGHT SIMULATOR. Set the lower view adjacent to a runway or even in an open grassy area such as New York's Central Park. Then either drag the panel down so only the top row of instruments shows, or do away with the panel alto-

gether. Now enable the Tower view and fly as you would fly RC. Use only the Tower view to take off, fly, perform stunts (if you can) and land. Excitement and challenge guaranteed.

Charles Gulick

West Palm Beach, FL

Having trouble connecting to the tanker in Ocean's EF2000? Set the autopilot to Mode 3, Tracking mode, and lock your

radar on to the 767 tanker. Set your air speed at around 550 initially, then use the A-button to reduce it as you approach the tanker. Eventually you should end up lined up just behind the tanker at the proper altitude. Now you can toggle off the autopilot and line up manually for hookup.

Idran Smoot

Petal, MS

AIR WARRIOR was first on the flight line with realistic WW II-era flight models, giving folks used to simpler "everything flies like a jet" flight models of the times a steep learning slope to climb. Even worse, though, were the first encounters with human pilots. Taking off in AIR WARRIOR

and sending a message along the lines of "Hey, I'm new here, what am I supposed to do?" would generally be followed by a response of "Just fly straight and level, we'll be along to help you in a minute." Sure, help you make a big crater in the landscape.

These days, the experience isn't so jarring. There's a bit more chivalry evident among most AW pilots, with regular online training sessions to initiate newbies. (Still, you should be prepared to be called a "dweeb" until you get your act together, but that's just typical military-style initiation stuff.) The rest of the flight sim world has caught up with AW's flight modeling, so concepts such as accelerated stalls are no longer foreign to every first-time flier.

You can hop into the AW arena and just fly over to enemy territory and shoot things; that's certainly fun. But the real fun is getting involved with one of the many AW squadrons. They meet at specific times and fly realistic missions, with dozens of players enacting battles featuring, for example, waves of B-17 bombers escorted by P-51s.



BOOM AND SQUINT The new Windows version of AIR WARRIOR still sports a fairly small window for watching the action, but new 800x600 and 1024x768 modes should make for easier viewing.

plays right off the WorldWide Web.

The biggest change is that AW is now a 32-bit Windows application. Although setup is easiest under Win 95, it will also work under Windows 3.1 using the supplied Win32s and WinG add-ons. The move to Windows hasn't slowed the program down, and owners of faster machines can now play in 800x600 and 1024x768 resolutions in addition to the standard 640x480. AW still surrounds the out-the-canopy view with lots of imagery of instruments and controls, so the larger screen sizes are very welcome, eliminating the "quarter-screen video" feel of the original SVGA AW. According to Bruce Milligan, who's helping develop Interactive Magic's boxed version of AW, Kesmai plans to spend around a quarter of

Air Warrior Arsenal

AIR WARRIOR 2.0 lets you fly 28 realistically modeled vintage aircraft:

World War I

- Bristol F.2B Brisfit
- Fokker D.VII
- Fokker Dr.I Triplane
- Sopwith Camel
- Spad S.XIII

World War II

- A-26B Invader
- A6M5a Zero
- B-17G Flying Fortress
- B-25J Mitchell
- C-47 Skytrain
- F4U-1D Corsair
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- P-51D Mustang
- Spitfire Mk IX
- Yak-9d

Korea

- F-86F Sabre
- MiG-15

Ground Vehicles

- Jeep
- T-34 Tank
- Flakpanzer IV "Fireball"
- Truck

WORLD WAR II '96

AIR WARRIOR has been slowly enhanced over the years, with a few major updates such as the SVGA version marketed by Konami as a stand-alone sim. (And it was a sim that was a glaring example of the advantages of multiplayer combat, the drone AI pilots in SVGA Air



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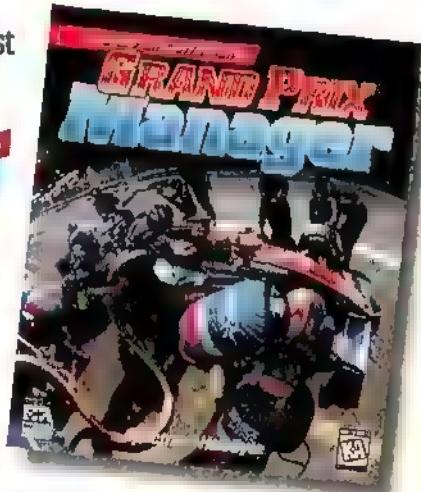


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a million dollars just on redoing cockpit artwork, going as far as sending people to Russia to photograph cockpits. External detail on the 26 included planes has been enhanced as well, with light-shaded polygons, insignia on aircraft, and shadows so detailed you can actually watch the propellers begin turning from a lower ball turret when your pilot cranks up the engines.

If you haven't seen AW since the early days, you'll be surprised at the sophistication of the new release. Enhanced flight controllers such as the CH FlightStick Pro and Thrustmaster WCS are now supported, and the cockpit graphics imagery



FIELD OF DREAMS Instead of selecting options with a text-based interface, the new Air Warrior has you click your way around a virtual airfield.



I WAS FRAMED! Cockpit view obstructions are realistically rendered, so spotting oncoming bogeys in planes like the P-38 can be challenging.

has been greatly enhanced. Airfield and plane selections are no longer made using an antiquated command line, but rather by clicking in beautifully-rendered squadron ready rooms.

It's not just the cockpit graphics that are enhanced. Perhaps most striking about

the beta version of AW that I've been flying is the flak you encounter over enemy airfields. The puffs of black smoke form around your plane just like in the WW II movies. Another area scheduled for improvement is terrain graphics; the beta I flew still had the original

flat, polygonal terrain with pyramid-style mountains. "That's definitely something we want to address," said Milligan. "It won't be pyramids. Whether it'll be texture-mapping, I don't know, because frame rate is very important."

COMMERCIAL FLYING

Beginning AW pilots will be able to fly the unfriendly skies prepared for action, thanks to the upcoming boxed version of AW 2.0. This second try at creating a stand-alone version of the popular multiplayer sim should be more successful than the disappointing Konami release a few years ago. Kesmai has teamed with Interactive Magic, the U.S. distributor of sims such as APACHE, and the upcoming P-16 and HIND—not to mention the current home of MicroProse founder Wild Bill Stealey—to create this version.

This time, you won't be flying against a bunch of dumb drone pilots. The developers hope to be able to closely recreate the tenacity and unpredictability of the pilots you'll encounter in the real AW arena. They want to make sure you don't end up flying against aerial "terminators," though. Milligan says, "They had to dumb down the AI a bit. The AI pilots were flying consistently at the edge of the envelope, something a real pilot wouldn't be able to manage."

"The current plan is for over 100 missions, ranging from World War I to Korea, with a focus on World War II," adds Milligan. "The missions are historical in nature, but not necessarily based on specific occurrences."

In our May, 1995 issue you read about CONFIRMED KILL, Domark and ICI's attempt to do AIR WARRIOR one better. Late last year Domark and ICI parted company, not on the most amicable of terms.

Domark has been putting together a new development team to create a version of CONFIRMED KILL with wider appeal than the sim they originally planned to release with ICI.

Meanwhile, the original CONFIRMED KILL code has been resurrected WARBIOS. The multiplayer sim went live last December, sporting a new graphics engine from Graphic Simulations, the developers of A-10 and F-18 for the Macintosh. For more information on WARBIOS point your web browser to <http://www.cs.com/~gunjam>

These won't be your typical "hit waypoint A, then hit secondary target B, then fly home" missions. Some have almost puzzle-like elements. "Your mission may be to stop Ju-88s from bombing some other airfield," Milligan says. "But as you take off, you'll find a flight of Ju-88s heading to bomb your own field. Do you fly the assigned mission, or protect your home airfield?"

Gone is the predictability you've come to expect in some other sims. At the end of a mission, you may return to base in your Me-262 only to find a flight of P-47s strafing your field. Meanwhile, you're almost out of fuel and ammo. As Karl Malden says, "What will you do?"

Although you'll fly the bundled missions without the aid of other human players, the developers want to give you the feeling you get in the multiplayer arena. You'll receive messages from other pilots, and you'll be able to direct other pilots in your group.

Even if you plan to fly AW online almost exclusively, the boxed version could be a blessing. Shipping on CD, it will include around 100 MB of digitized artwork, sounds, and terrain data—data that would take hours to download even on the fastest Internet connections.

Look for the new version of AW to go online around the beginning of February. As this column went to press, Kesmai wasn't ready to announce on which services the new version would be playing, so you'll need to call them at 804-963-8500 for logon information.

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Russian Into Combat

Eschewing Yankee Flash For Eastern Bloc Utilitarianism, Su-27 FLANKER Packs A Realistic Punch

by Robin G. Kim

Mteam of Russian programmers creates a sophisticated simulation of the former Soviet Union's premier air superiority fighter, and passes it off to an American corporation. International espionage? No, computer entertainment! In a wonderful example of 90's-style détente, teams in Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States have worked together to bring you Su-27 FLANKER. This Win 95 sim (a DOS version is set to follow soon) shows almost fanatical attention to detail, and it's packed with challenges for even the most hard-core flight simulationists.

From the moment you start it up, you know this is one serious simulation. Instead of the obligatory multimedia intro

sequence, you're greeted with the full screen mission planning window where you'll spend all your time between flights. (The almost obligatory set of multimedia video clips is included, but you have to seek them out.) Flash without substance is clearly not the point of this mission-based simulation.

The action takes place in the Crimea, a peninsula in southern Ukraine, during a hypothetical conflict between Russia and the Ukraine. Select the mission you want to fly, check out the briefing, payload, and waypoints, then it's off to the cockpit

for English translations.)

Looking outside the cockpit, you may be in for a bit of a disappointment. With the current trend toward Gouraud shading and texture-mapped graphics, Su-27's flat-shaded polygons are something of an anachronism. Despite the lack of textures, the object graphics are impressively detailed and display realistically articulating parts. Aircraft look somewhat plain, but the control surfaces move, external ordnance is shown, and the clean graphics let you see which way a bomb is pointing at a good distance. Terrain graphics, however, are Spartan.

Because you usually don't have much time for sightseeing during missions, a full-featured flight recorder is provided, allowing you to replay missions or even jump in and take the controls. Camera angles can be saved during playback, enabling you to create dramatic combat footage of events across the entire battlefield.

All this detail comes at a price. The frame rate on a P5-90 system with PCI



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hard drive space, 2x
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sound card recommended.
Protection: None (CD
must be in drive)
Designer: Sergey
Boz (Cobra)
Publisher: Mindscape
Novato, CA
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video is good, but not totally smooth. Since there are few options for reducing the level of detail, a 486-66 with local bus video should be considered the bare minimum for this sim.

FEAR OF FLYING

Despite the somewhat retro graphics, SU-27 does a good job of immersing you in the combat environment. Sitting at the end of the runway, the nose dips as rising engine thrust strains against the wheel brakes. Release the brakes and the nose bobs back up as your Flanker quickly gains speed. Pull up at 300 km/h and you're airborne, ready to experience the most realistic flight model of any jet fighter simulation made for the PC.

But don't let this intimidate you—the SU-27 is a snap to fly. The feel is fluid, yet stable and damped. Pointing the plane where you want to go is easy enough, yet it doesn't feel like it's riding on rails.

Altitude and ordnance load affect acceleration and turn performance as expected.

SU-27 FLANKER's flight model also excels near the edge of the envelope—and beyond. Accelerated stalls (pulling past the stall angle of attack while going faster than level stall speed) and spins are exceptionally well done, and other rarely-encountered effects such as roll reversal and precession are also modeled.

THE SILENT TREATMENT

Flying alone all the time isn't much fun, and in SU-27 FLANKER you don't have to. Up to three wingmen may accompany you on your missions, and you will often run across other friendly aircraft intent on their own tasks. But as there are no digitized voices or even text messages from other aircraft, you may feel like you're by yourself anyway; sound effects in general are weak in this sim. There are few commands you can issue to your wingmen, and your ability to control each individually is limited.

The artificial intelligence of your wingmen and all computer-controlled aircraft is very good, however. Computer pilots make extensive use of the vertical, and usually manage their energy effectively. Enemy flights use team tactics aggressively,

ly, splitting up when engaged.

Concentrate too much on one bandit, and another will surely be moving in on your six.

ARMED AND DANGEROUS

The weapons modeling—everything from guidance systems to missile intercept trajectories to gravity drop of ballistic weapons—is top notch. Over 35 types of aircraft ordnance are provided, and air defense systems are equally varied, including nine kinds of AAA and 13 SAM launcher types.

If this array of air defenses doesn't frighten you, it should—the combat environment in SU-27 FLANKER is extraordinarily deadly. Part of the danger comes from your realistically modeled missile launch detector that only sounds if a rocket motor is burning while in range of the system. Missiles fired from far away won't

SIMULATION / SPACE

Lost Sight, Lost the Fight

The flexibility of a cockpit view system can make or break a flight sim—you can't dogfight what you can't see. SU-27 FLANKER gives you 42 fixed overlapping view angles you can pan between, and a padlock view that tracks your target automatically. Despite the large set of views, you have a 180-degree blind spot to the rear due to the SU-27's canopy placement and bulky ejection seat. The real plane has rear-view mirrors to minimize the blind spot, but they did not make it into the initial release of the game. (They should be available in the SU-27 1.1 patch.)

If you manage to padlock your target and then lose it in the blind spot, your view will freeze in that direction. Don't panic and start panning around trying to reacquire him; just keep turning. If you can bring him back into view in the next few seconds, padlock tracking will resume. You'll know the padlock view has given up when you're booted back to the default forward view.

Even when your target is not in your blind spot, it's easy to lose track of where you're looking and become disoriented. The solution comes from the SU-27's helmet-mounted display.

Whenever your view is shifted so the HUD is no longer visible, a compact overlay appears, displaying critical flight information. The overlay's offset from the center of the screen corresponds to the direction and angular distance between where you're looking and straight ahead, so you always know which way you're facing.



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ON SHIP Ships and ground vehicles are extremely detailed, with spinning radar dishes and turrets which rotate smoothly to engage targets—including you.

trigger any warning beyond a radar lock indication. Even worse, maneuvering to evade missiles is difficult because they're so hard to spot once their rocket motors burn out. When you do manage to avoid a direct hit, blast damage from a near miss may knock out some of your systems anyway. In an uncharacteristic concession to playability, your aircraft can sustain a lot of punishment before going down—a single direct hit from most missiles will usually still leave you flying.

Unfortunately, not all the difficulty in surviving such formidable air defenses is realistic. Your plane's ECM jammers do not work, and your antiradiation missiles won't lock onto some radars as they should. Fixes to both of these bugs are expected in an upcoming patch.

Fortunately, the remainder of the plane's systems function properly. Although the Su-27 is primarily tasked with the air-to-air role, it does have a secondary ground attack capability, which is the focus of many of the sim's missions; its battery of convincingly-modeled avionics is well suited to both tasks.

The manual describes the operation of all the plane's systems clearly and in great depth. It seems to cater more toward the experienced sim pilot, however, with detailed descriptions of the various weapon, sensor, and guidance systems modeled in the game, but almost no discussion of air combat tactics. Novices can learn how to work their planes, but when

thrown into the missions it's just sink or swim. In a trend started by I-Magic's APACHE, an online hypertext version of the paper manual is also provided.

MISSION CONTROL

Tinkerers will love the game's powerful mission editor, which not only lets you

tweak your flight plans, but also create entirely new missions. Its biggest limita-

Su-27 development began in the late 1960s, around the same time as its Western counterpart, the F-15 Eagle. Known to NATO as the Flanker, it is referred to unofficially by Russian pilots as the *Zhuravlik*, or "Crane," because of its shape. Although it is a big aircraft—some 25% heavier than an F-15C—it is extremely maneuverable thanks to its large wing area, longitudinally unstable design, and two powerful afterburning turbofan engines. Flight control is a combination of analog fly-by-wire and conventional hydro-mechanical linkages.

Size has its advantages. In the Su-27's case, it translates into no fewer than ten missile-capable hardpoints and a staggering fuel capacity—the maximum range of the Flanker on internal fuel is comparable to that of an F-16 carrying three drop tanks. To take full advantage of its large missile load, the aircraft is equipped with

a long range pulse-doppler look-

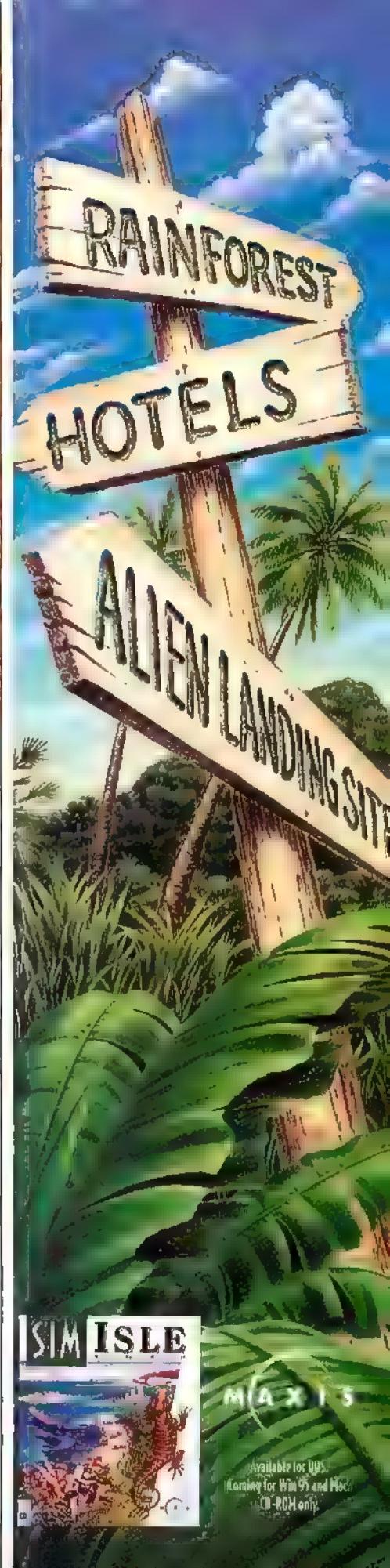
down/shoot-down radar capable of tracking 10 targets simultaneously. In a dogfight, the Flanker's electro-optical system and helmet-mounted sight enable the pilot to find and track targets undetectably, and launch the highly advanced R-73 (AA-11 Archer) heat-seeking missile at targets up to 60 degrees off-boresight. Though air-to-ground work is only a secondary function of the Su-27, its radar is capable of generating detailed patch maps for ground targeting using doppler beam sharpening and synthetic aperture techniques.

Combining world class performance, range, weapons load, and avionics, the Su-27 clearly ranks as one of the most capable and deadly air-superiority aircraft in service today.



SU-27 FLANKER

SIMULATION/SPACE



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RUNWAY MODELS Submunition dispenser pods can make a mighty mess of the Tarmac.

tion is that ground vehicles and ships cannot move. The editor is also missing a few documented features such as clouds and an online encyclopedia; SSI hopes to include these in the aforementioned patch.

Missions fall into several categories, from solo missions with fixed flight plans to huge scenarios requiring you to choreograph all Russian air, land, and sea assets in the theatre. After each mission you can pull up a detailed debrief report listing the result of every shot fired. Since so much is going on during a mission, this is a great way to find out what happened beyond what you saw from the cockpit. Some training missions are included, but most are extremely difficult, and any

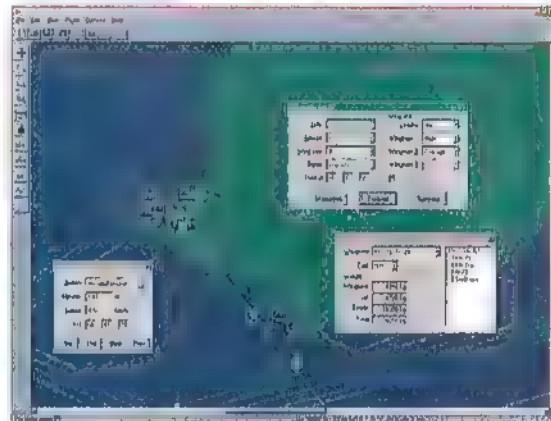
training value they have is from the school of hard knocks. Several of the standard missions are also hard to complete, but should get easier once the ECM and AIM bugs are fixed.

Players desiring a campaign game or career mode are in for a disappointment. All the missions are entirely standalone (although if they're played in order, they do simulate a campaign scenario), and last no longer than a game day. Perhaps SSI will consider including a campaign mode in a future add-on, but in the meantime players will have to check online sources for new missions.

For now, SU-27 FLANKER will have to stand on its own merits, and it does stand

tall. Despite some minor shortcomings, no other air combat simulation can match its mix of dead-on realism, competent artificial intelligence, and the amazing complexity with which the missions play themselves out. The learning curve is steep, and the

game lacks the breadth of some other titles, but if depth, accuracy, and control are what you look for first in a sim, then SU-27 FLANKER's cockpit awaits. ■



CRIMEA CONTROL The mission editor allows creation of scenarios with huge numbers of ships, ground vehicles, and planes ranging from close support aircraft to strategic bombers.

►TARGET AUDIENCE: Hard-core flight simulation fans who value accuracy over flashy graphics.

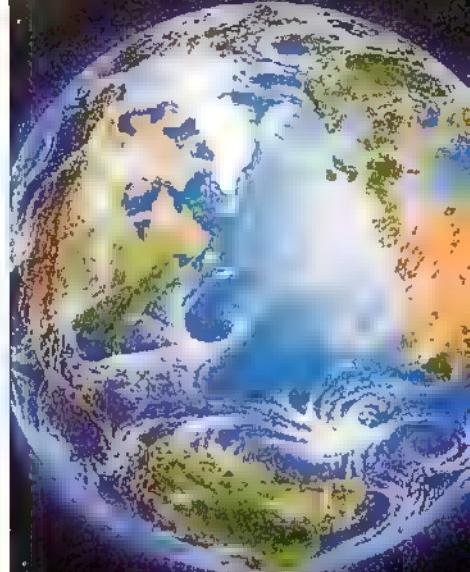
►PROS: Precise flight modeling and deadly enemy AI in the air and on the ground makes for an adrenaline-pumping combat experience. Mission builder allows creation of extremely complex scenarios.

►CONS: No campaign mode; some important features were omitted in order to ship the game before Christmas, so

playability is hampered until SSI's announced patch ships. Lack of communication with wingmen brings a feeling of isolation.



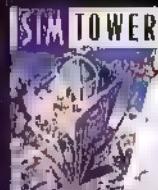
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Star Raiders Redux

Recipe For Action: Take One Part Space Combat, Add A Pinch Of Strategy, Sprinkle With A Dash Of Nostalgia

by Scott A. May

Nostalgia alert! Drop shields and prepare to dock with a classic game. Interactive Magic's *STAR RANGERS* is an unofficial tribute to the timeless Atari 400/800 classic, *STAR RAIDERS*. The bells and whistles may reflect present day expectations, but the basic gameplay remains true to the original. Except this time, you're not facing ultra-low-res TIE Fighter-wannabees, but rather *WING COMMANDER IV*-esque, 3-D space fighters.

Alas, tributes are only effective if today's audience remembers yesterday's achievements. That said, *STAR RANGERS'* ode to the origins of electronic gaming may be lost on players cutting their galactic teeth on Origin's *WING COMMANDER* series or LucasArts' *X-WING*. Compared to these games, brimming with flash and sizzle, *STAR RANGERS* may appear a bit sparsely decorated and short on substance.

BORDER PATROL

Essentially a space combat game, sprinkled with elements of on-the-fly strategy, the game casts players in the Republic's elite *STAR RANGERS* corps, dedicated to defending residents of the frontier from expansionist neighbors. In other words, protect humans from evil aliens. Typical duties include patrolling border quadrants, blasting wayward stragglers, defending outposts, rescuing civilians, and escorting space convoys. Chief among your adversaries are the Tauregs, a faceless race of alien creatures hell bent on push-

ing back the human frontier.

The game defaults to Practice mode, where you can bone up on your space dogfighting skills against a variety of increasingly persistent enemies. This is also the place to familiarize yourself with ship displays, keyboard controls and joy-

ONE-SHIP WONDER

STAR RANGERS pilots fly the RC-10, a generic model space craft that offers excellent performance but no room for future upgrades. Your Tauregan counterparts, on the other hand, appear in a variety of spacecraft, including scouts, fighters, bombers, cruisers and transports. Each is rated for speed and durability.

Stock weapons include plasma guns, cannons and rockets. Five missile types are available, with names indicative of their strength: Heater Seeker, Inferno, Bug-Eye, Bludgeon and Tac Nuke. Taureg forces are limited to



THINGS THAT MAKE YOU GO BOOM Plasma cannons ignite an enemy Taureg fighter, up close and personal.

stick performance. The game supports specialty controllers, including the CH Flightstick Pro, Thrustmaster FCS/FIQS and WCS/IQOS, Gravis Phoenix and Firebird, and Suncom F-15E Eagle. Depending on your setup, use the joystick and/or keyboard to adjust speed, cycle available ordnance, target enemy ships and change view modes. Like its earthbound flight sim cousins, the game offers multiple external views of the action from either the player, wingman or target ship's perspective. You can also turn off the cockpit panel for a broader view of the big picture, with all display gauges superimposed in the corners of the screen.

slower plasma guns and vastly inferior missiles, giving you a substantial edge in tactical combat. In true arcade fashion, the game balances your superior firepower with the sheer number and variety of opposing crafts. Difficulty levels can also be adjusted prior to each mission, affecting enemy tenacity and intelligence, as well as the speed at which critical events unfold.

Onboard ship displays are kept simple, to facilitate easy readouts during the heat of battle. The center radar is designed to show, within the context of a 2-D display, the orientation of objects surrounding you in 3-D space. It's an interesting system, involving concentric rings and color-

Price: \$59.95

System Requirements:
IBM compatible 486/33
(486/66 recommended)
MS-DOS 5.0 or higher
8 MB RAM, 18 MB hard
drive space, PCI or VESA
local bus video, 2x CD
ROM joystick
SoundBlaster compatible
sound card

of Players: 1
Protection: None
Designer: Michael Chen
Publisher: Interactive
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Research Triangle Park
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Circle Reader Service #186

crossed Xs and dots, but not terribly intuitive. Flanking the radar display are gauges showing current throttle, velocity, shield and energy levels. A multifunction display serves triple duty for communications, damage assessment and energy management systems. Finally, the targeting system. Vector images of ships currently targeted show orientation, shield strength, speed and distance. Consult this display to avoid wasting ships you're supposed to be protecting.

STAR PATROLS

Campaign mode launches a series of 17 self-contained missions, each with unique circumstances, goals and difficulty levels. Choose one of five wingmen to accompany you (three male and two female). Urgent orders for assistance often require warping from one section of the quadrant to another, using a strategic map to pinpoint your desired destination. You can expand the scope of the quadrant map by dropping transponders during flight. Warping involves a short but wild ride through a wormhole tunnel. The accuracy of your warp, along with energy depletion, is affected by your ability to navigate this narrow corridor.

The game's key strategy elements involve managing your ship's limited energy resources, while deciding which sector



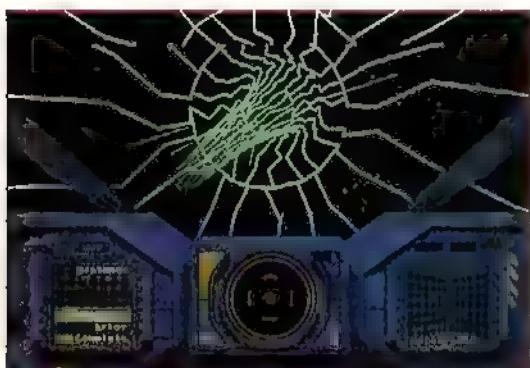
BUT WHERE'S HOBSES? Choosing a good wingman pays off—you can actually send him off on his own to dispatch the more wimpy threats.

hot spots require immediate attention. If the threat is slight, order a wingman to warp into combat and return when finished. As your ship incurs damage, use the energy management system to route energy from your guns to the shields, or vice versa. As the hull weakens and energy drains, dock at a friendly space station to replenish your systems.

Space combat is fast and frenzied. A fully functional HUD fills the main cockpit display with more information than some joystick jockeys probably care to know: missile locks, target designator, pitch/bank and directional indicators, velocity and throttle readouts, closing speed and intercept times. The action zips along at such breakneck pace, however, there's little time to appreciate such attention to detail. For rookie pilots, two in-flight options help ease the burden of combat slammage: Combat Autopilot tracks the currently targeted craft, and Match Speed mode matches your speed to the target's if it's within 300 meters.

Most of the game's option menus deal with graphic detail and screen resolution. Here you can toggle ship texture mapping, Courant shading, background details and presflight cinematics. Action sequences can be viewed in either high (640 x 480) or low (320 x 240) resolutions. Another important option allows you to switch between arcade-style versus flight-sim joystick orientation.

The game's greatest weakness is the nature of its linear campaign mode. Each mission must be successfully completed



DIG THAT WORMHOLE Warping from sector to sector requires traveling through a wormhole; imprecise navigation will leave you far from your desired location.

before ascending to the next. The designers compensate somewhat for this by randomly generating key parameters for each mission, changing the location and movement of friends and foes. It's a superficial fix for a fundamental problem: Campaigns should progress along a branching storyline, with each success or failure determining the ultimate outcome. Here, campaign mode is simply a smoke screen for arcade-style play levels. Hit the ceiling of your present abilities and the game simply stalls.

ONLY BLAST-ADDICTS NEED APPLY

The game also suffers from a lack of personality. There's no background story or between-scene cinematics to suggest the player is part of some larger, robust space adventure. Indeed, compared to other efforts in the genre, this game seems oddly incomplete. Space combat alone may have enthralled players 15 years ago, but today's audience expects something much substantial—more "Hollywood." Perhaps there are players who dislike the cinematic approach, who would rather be vaporizing aliens than following some contrived space opera. If that's the case, warp on over and begin blasting.

Truth be told, *STAR RANGERS* begs to be more than it is. The nostalgia factor makes for a fine coda, but won't sell to today's sophisticated market. Though technically adept and stylistically exciting, an overall lack of ambiance renders the game little more than a simple space shooter. ♦

APPEAL: Space combat fans who find cinematic interludes annoying; anyone who's waited 15 years for an update of *Star Raiders*.

PROS: White-knuckle space combat coupled with intriguing strategy elements. SVGA graphics and atmospheric sound effects are a plus. Excellent joystick support.

CONS: Lacks personality. Linear campaign mode hampers long-term player involvement. Combat sequences are well-designed, but repetitive.





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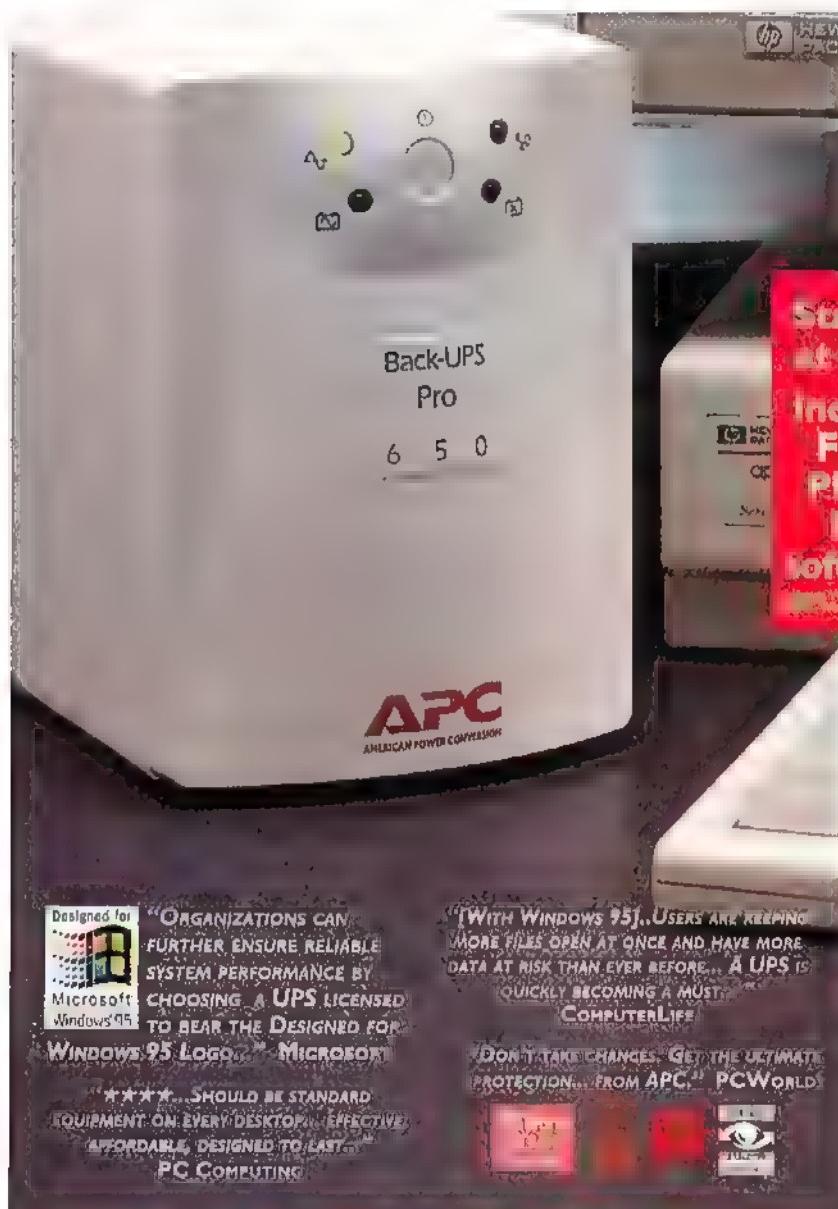
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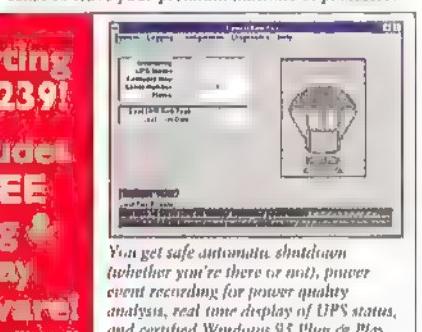


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Marine Fighter Flight School

Formgen's F/A-18 Simulation Opens The Cockpit For Beginning Pilots

by Scott A. May

Overwhelmed. That's the feeling most newcomers experience as they test fly most of today's high-end air combat simulations. Even if their machines have the necessary power, would-be pilots often eject from the game out of sheer frustration. If that's a familiar situation, take a closer look at FormGen's **BLACK KNIGHT**, a combat sim suitable for beginners.

Green pilots can start with eight training missions, which guide you through such fundamentals as take-offs and landings, waypoint navigation, air combat, and ground attacks. Such basic training, coupled with onscreen text cues and an in-flight instructor, help make this an ideal choice for those learning to stretch their flight sim wings. Free-flight mode also helps novice pilots learn flight controls and cockpit instrument layouts.



Price: \$49

System Requirements: IBM-compatible 386-33 or higher (486-66 or better recommended), MS DOS 5.0 or higher, 8 MB RAM, 13 MB hard drive space, VGA or better keyboard (mouse joystick optional), supports Sound Blaster compatible sound cards

of Players: 1

Protection: None

Designer: SE Software

Publisher: FormGen

Software

Scottsdale, AZ

(800) 263-2390

Reader Service #341

Once you're ready for action, **BLACK KNIGHT** anted up 50 full-featured combat missions, escalating in difficulty from simple arcade-style shoot-outs to tactically intense combinations of air and ground offensives. Wingmen are present in most scenarios, though in-flight communication is not an option. Enemy AI ranges from lame ducks to elusive pests in later missions, but they rarely bare their teeth quite so ferociously as those found in top-flight sims such as Spectrum's **FALCON** 3.0. For beginners (there's that word again), **BLACK KNIGHT** should prove plenty lethal.

Players seeking a bird's eye-view of each kill can singe their eyebrows using the "mission cam." Flight controls are



NIGHT KNIGHTS Even the dark palette of night combat can't mask the dated appearance of **BLACK KNIGHT**'s graphics.

responsive, if a tad on the touchy side.

A flight recorder lets you review your aerial hits and misses. Though a bit clumsy to use, the recorder is awash with the usual features, including preset and user-defined viewing angles, and VCR-style controls with pause, play and slow-motion replay in both forward and reverse. Memorable clips can be saved to disk and reloaded for future viewing.

The weakest link to **BLACK KNIGHT**'s overall success are its outdated graphics. Aesthetically, the visuals are sparse but pleasing, helped along with Couraud shading, realistic ground fog and atmospheric effects. Compared to today's SVGA texture-mapped beauties, however, the birds in **BLACK KNIGHT** look pale and flimsy. If you're seeking more than flat polygonal shapes and chunky low-res explosions, you won't find it here.

The game's sound effects pull up some of this slack, however, with superb stereo simulations of Doppler shifts during combat. The sim incorporates volumes of digitized speech, ranging from the familiar female in-flight computer to an almost overzealous cockpit buddy who constantly barks navigational and targeting instructions. Pilots in training will no doubt

appreciate the latter's helpful hints, coupled with freeze-frame text descriptions of waypoints, target markers and weapons systems. Experienced air combat pilots will quickly tire of the chatter.

The 80-page manual is an easy read for those unaccustomed to the genre, and is packed with good introductory air-combat techniques.

Unfortunately, the manual makes little mention of enemy forces and shuns any reference to any of the game's missions.

Air combat veterans aren't likely to give **BLACK KNIGHT** more than a curious glance. If you're a green recruit to PC air combat sims, however, this should be enjoyable introduction. It's simple, but sleek, and not at all intimidating.



Download the shareware version of **Black Knight** at <http://www.zdnet.com/~panig>.

APPEAL: First time sim-fliers, or sim fans with older hardware that won't handle cutting-edge games.

PROS: Excellent training vehicle for air combat newcomers. Tasty smorgasbord of predefined sorties, with mission creator and free flight options to boot. Runs smooth, even on low-end machines. Shareware preview version available, a true rarity for this genre.

CONS: Technically, a good five years behind the times. Enemy AI not terribly challenging, and generic foes give game a certain sterile look and feel. No multi-player option.



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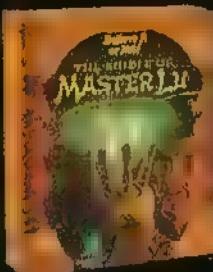
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3 Mech Clans And A Legacy

The Ghost Bear Clan Brings Something New To The MECHWARRIOR 2 Experience

by Martin E. Cirulis

The well-deserved success of MECHWARRIOR 2 has spawned an avalanche of gamers demanding more. More Mechs, more scenarios, more battlefields! Well, Activision has finally answered those demands with GHOST BEAR'S LEGACY (CBL).

At its core, CBL is simply another career track, like the Wolf and Falcon tracks in the original MW2. While the Ghost Bears are a lesser-known Clan, and did not fare well in the first invasion of the Inner Sphere, they are still dangerous and dream of gaining ascendancy in the aftermath of the Falcon/Wolf War. Unfortunately, right before the Bears can launch their new offensive for control of the Clans, someone manages to steal the Bear Clan's precious genetic heritage material.

The theft leaves the future of the entire Ghost Bear Clan in jeopardy. You undertake a series of missions to track down the thieves—first thought to be House Kurita—but you soon realize things are not as they seem.

Ghost Bear's plot is actually a good one, and while it sometimes devolves into "Button, Button, who's got the Button?" the idea of searching as well as destroying has been implemented nicely. Players used to blasting everything in sight and asking questions later will find themselves in trouble here. Another nice touch is that the player is usually on small-unit, deep penetration missions, without the full logistical might of the Clans behind them.

This means that players often must keep one Mech design for several missions until they return to the main base.

WHERE'S THE BEEF?

So, how much cool stuff is there? Plenty. First off, there are 14 new Mech designs to master. Also new are an array of weapons from the universe of the Battletech boardgame that were missing in MW2, including such useful items as Anti-Missile guns and Inferno SRM Racks. More novelties are an increased army of opposing vehicles like SIRV-Carriers and the Schick assault tank.

Players will find themselves in such exotic locales as underwater and in the outer hull of a jumpship. There is even an attempt to add a kind of forest terrain, although it looks more like you're fighting between tall, skinny columns than trees.

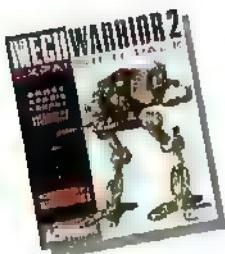
If there is a flaw in CBL, it is a technical one. Surprisingly, the game doesn't meld and upgrade your old version of MW2. Other than checking to see if you own the original disk, it stays a separate game. And while some of MW2's idiosyncrasies have been corrected, it seems a bit rushed at times and lacks the polished feel of the original. Underwater combat and strafing attacks are great ideas, but neither has been ideally implemented. Other than the blue environment and certain weapon peculiarities, there isn't much sense of being under water. And fighters glide slowly through the air, moving more like hover tanks than vehicles constrained by the laws of physics.



► **WATER SPORT** Players of the Expansion Pack will fight with new mechs, new weapons, and in new environments, such as underwater.

Other than this technical nit-picking, my only other concern is one of length. The game contains the same combat simulator/instant action as the original, but I'm afraid rabid MechWarriors will exhaust the single career track rather quickly. Those hoping for a scenario-builder or the much-promised network package will have to keep waiting.

This being said, GHOST BEAR'S LEGACY is still a damn good expansion package, one that actually fleshes out the Battletech universe for computer gamers, rather than just delivering "more of the same." The Bear's bellowing roar is worthy to take its place with the Falcon's angry cry and the Wolf's noble howl. ♦



Price: \$39.95

System Requirements:
IBM compatible 486-66 MHz, 8 MB RAM (7 MB of free EMS) DOS 6.0 or higher, 40 MB hard drive space 2x CD ROM drive
MechWarrior 2

Number of Players: 1
Protection: None (CD-ROM must be in drive)
Designer: Chad Findley
Publisher: Activision
Los Angeles, CA
(800) 477-3650
Reader Service: #345

► **APPEAL:** Gung-ho MechWarriors eager to volunteer for a dangerous assignment—you know who you are.

► **PROS:** A good story, 14 new Mech designs, new weapons from the Battletech universe, and new environments.

► **CONS:** Combat physics in the new environments don't seem entirely realistic. The new career track probably won't pose a long-term challenge to experienced players.

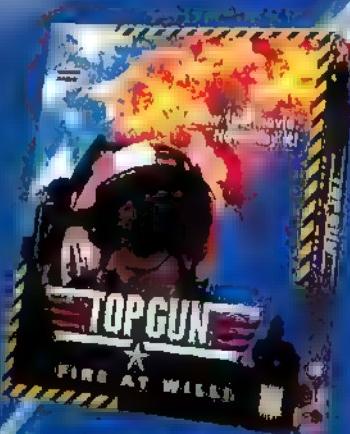


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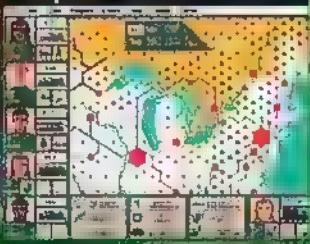
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The Wings Of War

Mastery Of Flank Attacks Is The Most Decisive Route To Victory

by Alan Emrich

Although there is much to be said about military maneuvers, the most difficult, invariably, are those

executed on the battlefield. From ancient to modern times, battles commenced when two forces would line up in opposition, each seeking to defeat the other.

Since the shortest distance between two points remains a straight line, the natural

tendency was for each army to launch into a full, frontal assault, thus spawning the standard battlefield maneuvers of the "charge" and its antithesis: "stand." These unimaginative ploys have lead to many bloody, and often inconclusive, battles.

Before the trench lines of WW I extended across entire fronts, armies were deployed along roughly parallel lines, each with a center and two flanks (left and right). Superior commanders would try to anchor their flanks along difficult terrain (rivers, woods, etc.), but few natural barriers are impassable to armies. Thus, the flanks of a force are often exposed to potential enemy maneuvers.



STRENGTH VERSUS WEAKNESS

It wasn't long before wise field commanders added an attack upon the enemy's flanks to their book of battlefield maneuvers. When successfully executed, this maneuver often proved decisive. Why? The cold logic is revealing: the goal is to direct your strongest attack capability against the enemy's weakest position least able to counterattack—the classic con-

BRIEFINGS

► HPS Simulations has developed three campaign disks for PANTHERS IN THE SHADOWS. They include: INTO THE CAULDRON (4th County of London Yeomanry in North Africa, 1941/1942), RACE ACROSS FRANCE (1st SS Panzer, from Operation Goodwood to the Falaise Gap, 1944), and THUNDERBOLT! (The 37th Tank Battalion during the Arracourt tank battles).

Players will love the carpet bombing feature!

► Interplay Productions is rumored to have scored the rights to do the PC version of Milton Bradley's Axis & Allies.

► Grolier is planning to enter the strategy games market. Partnering with new player Hyperbolic (not to

be confused with Greg Roach's Hyperbole Studios), the company is planning to release BATTLE OF THE IRONCLADS (naval action during the War Between The States) and BATTLESHIPS OF STONE (where the player works with the king's architect in order to build the most efficient castle).

► I've discovered two great new scenarios. The first comes from Nicholas Bell (72182.1667@compuserve.com) with a file name of BARANOV.ZIP. Here you have a TIGERS ON THE PROWL scenario where the beleaguered 3rd Panzer Division counterattacks lead elements of the Soviet 1st Guard Tank Army on August 16th, 1944. Two full-strength Panzer V compa-

nies with supporting arms attack Russians of unknown strength holding a town and bridges.

► The other don't miss scenario (TOLKIEN

SCZ) comes courtesy of Steve Strayer (75233.565@compuserve.com). It's a well-researched War of the Ring scenario for WARLORDS II DELUXE.

The map and armies seem very true to the spirit of Middle Earth, and there is also good play balance.

► Norm Koger has released his unofficial version 1.30 update for his WARGAME CONSTRUCTION SET II: TANKS! game. New database and database compiler files are included.

“ A well-executed flank maneuver could just turn the enemy's line and also turn history on its side! ”



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"crossing the T," where your line of ships can fire their broadsides against the first (or last) few ships in the enemy's line because their ability to shoot back is severely limited. In other words, when encountering an enemy line of troops or ships, attacking it from a 90 degree angle allows you to put the maximum attack on the enemy's position while being exposed to only minimal return damage.

SIDE TO SIDE Lining up mobile units on the flanks or rear of your main force gives you more strength and flexibility in attacking and retreating. Try it yourself on the CD-ROM

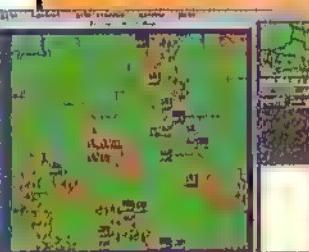
cept of applying strength to the enemy's weakness. In naval terms (once cannons were placed on ships), this is known as

FLANK STAKES

Because of the inherent vulnerability of

flanks, armies have learned to keep their most mobile forces on their wings (flanks) or in a reserve just behind the center of their line. While on the wings, mobile forces (be they cavalry, chariots, light infantry, or what have you) can quickly advance or fall back from their positions, allowing them to either threaten the enemy's flanks or to fall back from potential danger. Troops in the central reserve are placed there to either initiate or reinforce an attack on the enemy's flank, to defend their own line's flanks, to quickly plug holes in their own line, or exploit a breakthrough in the enemy's line with these fresh troops.

The danger to an army is very real when the enemy has maneuvered past its flanks. That exposes the rear of the army, including its lines of supply and communication, not to mention the soldiers' very backs. So the next time you're lined up square against the enemy on a simulated field of battle, look to the flanks for a point of decision on the battlefield. It could be the best turn your forces ever make. ☐



NAPOLEONIC COMPLEX? See if you can do better than Napoleon in the EMPIRE II Borodino scenario on CG's web site: <http://www.zd.com/~gaming>.

Flanks For The Win!

Napoleon, at the battle of Borodino, and Lee, at Gettysburg, faced similar situations. After two days of bloody, head-on, inconclusive fighting in enemy territory, a third day dawned that required a new stratagem to win the day and the battle. At both battles, brilliant supporting commanders (Marshal Davout at Borodino and General Longstreet at Gettysburg) suggested the tactic of turning the enemy's right flank. Of course, history also reports that their advice was

ignored in both cases, with another day of direct, bloody, head-on assaults resulting. Both Napoleon's and Lee's armies suffered heavily, with the French outlasting the Russians and advancing wearily on to Moscow, while Lee retreated back to Virginia with his exhausted troops.

The surprising thing is that both of these commanders seemed to be "off their game" at these battles. Napoleon's flanking maneuvers at Jena, Friedland, and Wagram show proof that he knew better. Likewise, Lee's brilliant flank attack at Chancellorsville just a few short weeks before Gettysburg showed what the "Gray Fox" was truly capable of.

The wonderful thing about wargames is that we can journey back to Borodino or Gettysburg and do what Napoleon and Lee never did. For our part, as gamers, we can play these situations out and heed the advice of Davout or Longstreet. A well-executed flank maneuver could just turn the enemy's line and also turn history on its side!

CG TIPS!

HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC: Short of finding an artifact, you can increase your hero's movement rate by simply exchanging all his troops for only fast units. Your hero moves only as fast as the slowest unit in his band. Thus, if your hero has a paladin, a few horse-

men, and some ogres, then he only moves at the ogres' slow pace. Get rid of the ogres, and the yellow movement bar by your hero's portrait will jump to full the next turn and stay there until you saddle him with some slower troops.

STEEL PANTHERS: To set up an infantry trap against armor, set your range to 1 since close combat occurs at 1 hex dis-

tance, not 0. Zero range is useless unless you want your snipers to stay unspotted in a tree hex. Use engineers against tanks that come into range because they can blow off almost any tank with flamethrowers and satchel charges. Use your infantry in reverse slope condition in order to avoid enemy concentration of fire once they are detected.

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Civilization Enters The Computer Age

Avalon Hill Converts Its Popular Board Game And Lets Rulers Build A Different Kind Of Empire

by Bob Proctor



At long last, the computer version of *ADVANCED CIVILIZATION* has arrived. No, it isn't *that* *CIVILIZATION*; it's a re-creation of the popular and venerable strategy board game. While the basic themes are similar, *ADVANCED CIVILIZATION*, from Avalon Hill, has a very different feel from Sid Meier's classic. There is no exploration, as it uses the same map every game. Instead of dog-eat-dog warfare with neighboring empires, you are encouraged to build your civilization through trade. And instead of gaining new military technology, empires strive to acquire Arts, Crafts and Sciences that help society surmount man-made and natural calamities.

CIRCA 8000 B.C.

Each player begins as the ruler of an ancient empire bordering the Mediterranean Sea. Each turn, your population grows, allowing you to build cities, which in turn garner you riches. You exchange these riches for the tools of Civilization, starting with cheaper ones like Pottery, Music and Astronomy, and moving on to more expensive ones like Medicine, Engineering or Literacy. Apart from being necessary to win, each Tool confers some advantage or ability; Pottery helps fight Famine, while Astronomy



MEDITERRANEAN FARE In *Advanced Civilization*, you must guide one of eight Mediterranean empires from infancy in the Stone Age into a thriving civilization.

allows ships to cross open oceans.

Goods have values from one to nine and are arranged in stacks according to value, somewhat like cards. If you have only one city, you get one good from the One stack. If you have three cities, you get one good from the One stack, one from the Two stack, and one from the Three stack, you are not only getting more cards, you're getting higher value cards. In order to get a good from the Nine stack, you must have nine cities on the board—the maximum allowable in the game.

The value of goods can be further increased by collecting sets of a single good. Since you can never draw two of the same good on any turn, the quickest

way to get more is to trade with other players. Goods are traded in books of three, and you must state honestly what two of them are. The third may be some Good of lesser value (promise them Cloth but give them Hides), or it may be a calamity that you had the misfortune to draw. Calamities, unfortunately, hide in the same stacks as the goods, waiting to be drawn by unsuspecting players. Most of the calamities, though, can be traded, and this adds an element of risk to the otherwise beneficial trading process.

CALAMITIES 'R' US

Anyone who thought the disasters were the best part of *Sim City* will love

Price: \$59.95

System Requirements:
IBM compatible 486 or better, 8 MB RAM, SVGA graphics, 4.2 MB hard drive space, 2x CD-ROM drive, mouse, supports most major sound cards

of Players: 1 to 8, same computer or e-mail

Protection: None (CD must be in drive)

Designer: Jim Synoski
Publisher: The Avalon

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Baltimore MD
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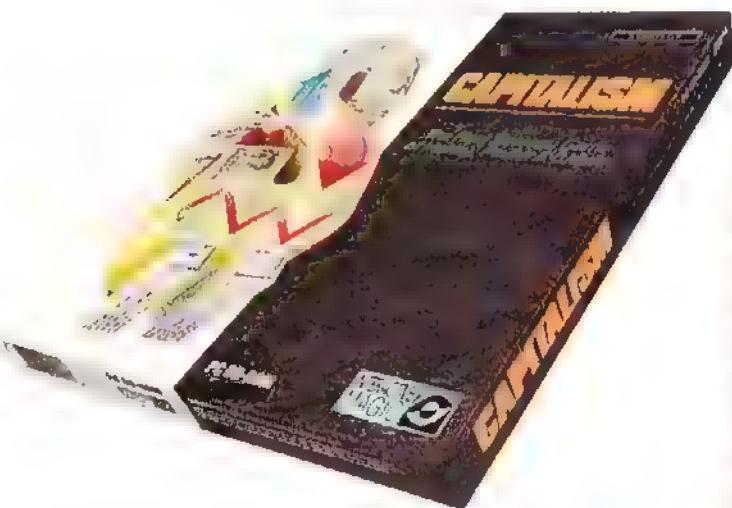
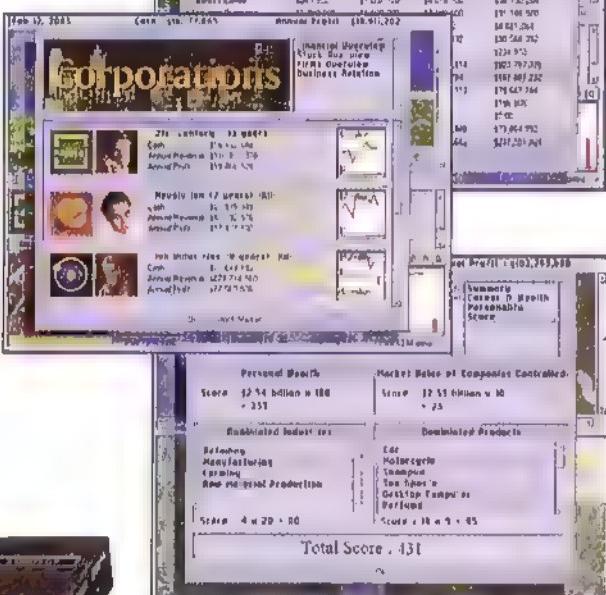
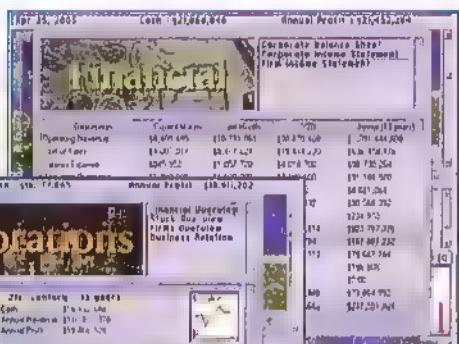
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ADVANCED CIV There are 12 different calamities, which are resolved during the turn they are drawn and go back into the stack, thus circulating rapidly and somewhat predictably. There are none in the One stack, so you don't have to worry about them until second cities are built. From then on, expect several per turn. They all reduce your population and cities in some manner. Some, like Civil War,



SIXTEEN STEPS TO VICTORY To win the game, you must advance your empire the full 16 steps along the Archaeological Succession Table, which tracks your progress through different ages.

tear off pieces of your empire and award them to the player who is furthest behind in development. Others, like Barbarian Lords, may affect more than one player depending on where they occur.

Digital vs. Board Game Mechanics

There are very few differences in rules and mechanics between the computer and board games. The biggest differences are in the trading phase: you always trade exactly three goods instead of three or more. This is not a big change, but it does rule out the kind of trades where a large set of a low-value good is traded for one or two higher value goods. The other difference is that trading is conducted in orderly rounds instead of in the chaotic shouting matches of face-to-face play. The number of trading rounds is variable and is set before the game begins; the default is two. Playing with only two rounds puts pressure on all players to get offers on the table or miss out, but at least the whole affair is more civilized.

Bigger differences occur when playing by e-mail (PBEM). In this mode, all players must be human, so you are limited to the number of partners you can find. One of the players controls the game. Files must be sent and received from each player. To reduce the number of exchanges, movement is conducted by all players simultaneously, which changes the feel of the game quite a bit. I did have considerable trouble with the game crashing in PBEM mode. If PBEM is important to you, I suggest you consult more recent information to see if this is a general problem or unique to me.

The ultimate object of the game is to advance your token across the Archaeological Succession Table (AST).

The AST has 16 spaces from beginning to end, so the game can never be shorter than 16 turns.

Players do not necessarily get to advance their token every turn, however, as there are five "Ages" and each age has certain

requirements that must be met before it can be entered. The Early Bronze Age, for example, requires that a player have two cities; the Late Bronze Age requires three cities and tools from three groups.

THE CRAFT OF GAME DESIGN

One interesting aspect of **ADVANCED CIVILIZATION** is the use of tokens to represent both people and money. Every player has the same number of tokens, kept in one of three places: on the map, where they represent your total population; in the Treasury, where they represent "money" or "in stock" awaiting use. Managing these tokens and moving them from place to place is vital for success in the game. Population expansion moves tokens from stock to the map, while forces detrimental to population move them from the map back into stock. Collecting taxes from your cities moves tokens from stock to Treasury. There, they can be used to purchase ships or tools, moving them back into stock. Notice that the two things you must do, population growth and taxes, move tokens out of stock. Not having enough tokens in stock when these phases come around is a major problem;

either you lose cities through Tax Revolt by not being able to pay taxes or you end up lacking the necessary tokens to expand or rebuild your cities.

You can play **ADVANCED CIV** with up to seven other players by hotseating, but this mode gets clumsy rather quickly. As a solitaire game, it has good AI, but the computer plays too consistently; it uses a set opening for each empire, no matter which difficulty you select. The difference



TRADE SHOWS Promise them Bronze and give them ... a Calamity. Trading is the quickest way to build wealth, but don't expect dealers to be entirely honest.

between levels becomes more apparent late in the game during trading and purchasing tools. An experienced player will have little trouble winning at the easy level because the computer will not buy tools wisely. At the highest level, however, the computer players are much better and keep things interesting by employing a variety of strategies.

THE DAWN OF A NEW CIVILIZATION

This is another great strategy game from Avalon Hill. If the "Play By E-Mail" option proves robust enough (see the sidebar for more on this subject), I think you'll see many games being played on the online services. In this mode, the possibility of sending e-mail to other players reintroduces some of the interaction that was the heart of the original board game. Played solitaire, though, **ADVANCED CIVILIZATION** is a good translation of the original board game, and should provide very cerebral, very complex gameplay for those who want to build civilizations rather than fight them.

APPEAL: This game is perfect for those who play the board game, or for those who don't mind long, involving strategy play.

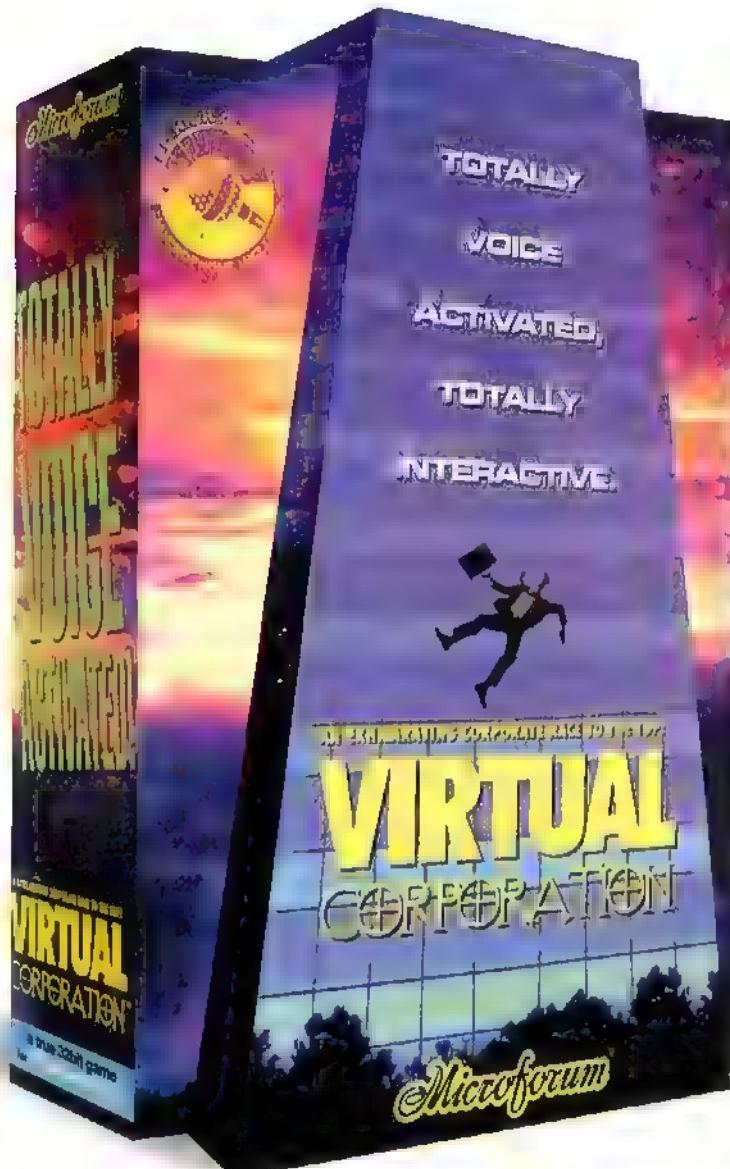
PROS: Advanced Civ is very faithful to the board game, has competent AI, and puts refreshing emphasis on building a cultured, literate, and advanced civilization.

CONS: Lack of network or modem play and buggy e-mail play hinder this otherwise good title.



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The Road To Camelot

Ascend England's Throne In A Game of Conquest, Quests and Romance

by Peter Olafson

Defender of the Crown has dubious humor in the medieval wargaming industry. Though pretty, this 1986 Cacumaware game squandered its resources on a range of pilfering sub-games, and instantly triggered a mini-industry of Pretenders to the Crown. CONQUEROR A.D. 1086, from Sierra, is the most recent pretender, but it is actually an above-average entry that preserves the graphic highs of Defender, while filling in the gameplay the original sorely lacked.

The graphics in CONQUEROR, mostly SVGA, are almost always eye-catching, and the music, especially those portions played from CD, is often poignant. There's also a good castle-raiding sequence, decent field battles, a joust, castle and village-building, farming and forest management and plenty of talking with rough characters, breathy chit-chat and ladies sweet and strange. It's not the ultimate answer to DEFENDER—some elements still need fine-tuning—but it is entertaining.

Before the game begins, you generate your character by rolling up a set of AD&D-style stats and then enhancing (or degrading) them with responses to a half-dozen, Ultima VI-style Q-and-A scenarios

set in your character's childhood. You can also collect cash and items for use later in the game during this time.

KISSING HIS HIGHNESS' HEINY

You start out in March 1086 as a young lord assigned to a pickeiling castle. The immediate task is simple survival, which involves slowly building your population, economy, armies and castle, while addressing the occasional modest request from your king. Ultimately, you'll either have to take the king's place by force, or become his champion by dispatching a great dragon.



A MAN'S HOME You start out with a castle and a village, and if you want to raise an army you'll have to spend some time building the economy and population.

Much of your time will be spent in your home office, building your fief by supplying the village with industries and houses, your forest with timber cutters and mines, your farms with crops and livestock and the castle with wings and walls.



YIELD OR DIE, KNAVE One of CONQUEROR's best features is its castle raiding sequences, which are in the first-person Doom vein.

It's fairly easy. Click on a desktop volume to summon the appropriate sub-map, pick an item from the accompanying list and then plunk down its icon on the map.

Oddly enough, what you build has no bearing on the main map, an isometric affair used for travel. It shows all castles in England and displays generic villages near each keep, regardless of what is actually being built. Depending on the village, it may include an inn, church, blacksmith and money-lender, and you can drop by and conduct digitized conversations.

At the inn, you'll get some tips and some hard looks. The priest will almost choke on his gratitude for a donation. The blacksmiths buy and sell a wide range of weapons and armor, and the money-lender does what you'd expect, at 50 percent interest.

If your village doesn't have all these functions, the next one down the road just might. Travel is both a pleasure and a burden. There's plenty to see in CONQUEROR. The map accurately represents 11th-century England, right down to Stonehenge, and in your journeys you'll spot locusts, rain squalls, visitations from the dragon, and seasonal transformations.

The problem comes when you need to get somewhere in a hurry. A tournament is held each month somewhere in the country and you're expected to reach it on your own initiative. The only way to achieve good speed while moving cross-country is to stick to the roads and clear

Price: \$54.95

System Requirements: IBM compatible 486-33 or better, 8 MB RAM, SVGA graphics, 2x CD-ROM drive, 12 MB hard drive space, mouse; supports Sound Blaster compatible sound cards

of Players: 1

Protection: None (CD must be in drive)

Designer: Software Sorcery

Publisher: Sierra Bellevue, WA (800) 757-7707

Reader Service #: 247



"I just escaped two poachers, brought down a wildebeest, and kept a pack of hyenas at bay... all before lunch!"

Here's a game you can
really sink your teeth into.

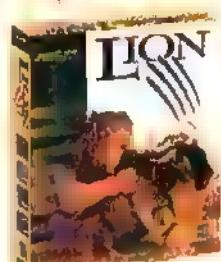
IRON

You are "the King of Beasts," in this incredible wildlife simulation. Experience the thrill of the hunt! Sniff out prey. Attack the stray buffalo. Pounce on gazelles. Feast on zebras. Life is good when you're King... or is it? Poachers and predators abound. Food and water are scarce. It's 'Survival of the Fittest' in the brutal wilderness of the African Serengeti.

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WOODS**



land. However, this being 1086, the roads aren't exactly highways and rarely point to where you're headed. It's tiresome to have to meticulously plot your character's movement, and it's entirely possible to spend months on the road, bumping into impassable bodies of water, switching from one destination to another, in search of a tournament that hasn't closed up shop yet. It's a shame the AI wasn't designed to take the best route, via the roads, to any given destination.

The tournament joust itself is handled as well as can be expected. In DEFENDER, there wasn't much to do in jousts except show up and lose. In CONQUEROR, you at least know you're trying to hit your opponent's shield. And even if you don't joust, you can still fight other knights for money in a 3-D melee and chat with the ladies in the grandstand. Much like the inn sequence, these interludes have a decided

they'll fight a pitched battle, played out in beautiful SVGA modes up to 1024 x 768, with easy-to-learn controls. But something is missing. Each rectangular battle site looks like the same well-trod soccer field, regardless of the terrain and season, and its small dimensions and chessboard-like setups don't leave much room for grand maneuvers.

Once you've dealt with any outstanding armies, you can make a play for the castle itself. At that point, you'll jump into a texture-mapped, full-screen 3-D segment, entering the enemy keep, looting its treasures and trying to slay its defenders.

This is the game's most ambitious and most successful sub-game. The castles have multiple levels, and come complete with dungeons, torches on the wall, stained glass in the chapels, and even bubbling cauldrons in the kitchen. You can also look up and down to see what's in the barrels and vases you smash.

Before you get too excited, let me say it is definitely not DOOM. The actual fighting doesn't offer much finesse, and the VGA graphics are several notches below those in the rest of the game. But it's fun and often challenging.

A number of your fellow knights also accompany you during your raid. You can order them collectively to follow you, attack, defend their positions or retreat and, using the automap, single them out and direct them to particular locations.

It's a great idea. Wish it worked better. They're smart enough to use the meat-and-potatoes dinners that are lying around to heal themselves. But you may find you're spending more time looking for your comrades than exploring. Unless you issue the "Follow me!" command every couple of steps, you'll find them bumping into walls in a corner of some distant room.

Enemy AI is wanting as well. You're allowed to attack opposing knights through windows, and they just stand



DAMSELS TO DIE FOR Venture to tournaments to increase your stats with jousts and melees, and also to romance the six lovely maidens of England.

there like sucks of potatoes and take it. The rather dim-witted AI isn't unique to the castle razing sequences. In full-battle mode, combat usually boils down to mob offensives, with all troops disregarding surrounding tactics for full-frontal assaults.

WORTH FIGHTING FOR?

CONQUEROR is definitely an ambitious title. There is literally something for everyone in this game, but it seems that with so many elements, none receives the proper attention it deserves. The castle sacking is fun and challenging, but could use better graphics. The full battles are gorgeous but suffer poor AI and repetitive terrain. Even the tournaments, though full of personality and fun, have problems of their own. CONQUEROR isn't the last word in medieval strategy, but it's more prince than pretender. And it's a far, far cry from Defender of the Crown. 

APPEAL: This is a game for those who like DEFENDER-style strategy gaming, or those enamored with a hybrid game with action, role-playing and wargaming elements.

PROS: This game has tactical battles, a little romance and role-playing, first-person Doom-like castle raids, empire building and some good graphics and sound.

CONS: All the disparate elements are poorly executed. The castle raids and wargaming lack good AI, the graphics are sometimes inconsistent, and gameplay can be slow and repetitive.



YE OLDE INN Every castle has a village, where you can get advice on running your fief as well as clues on how to defeat brigands and the dragon.

charm, and the women have distinct personalities—a real achievement when you consider all you're getting is a static graphic and a voice.

Eventually, you'll reach an acceptable level of financial stability and security at home, and you'll want to broaden your horizons... in the military sense.

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Romancing The Throne

Make A Bid For The Empire In 2nd Century China

by Elliott Chin

In the second century AD, the once-glorious Han Dynasty in China was being crushed under the weight of corruption and natural calamities that had thrown the populace into min. Frustrated with the government's indifference, a group of malcontents rebelled in an uprising dubbed the Yellow Turban Rebellion, so named for the yellow headdress its members wore. The Yellow Turban Rebellion gained popularity among China's oppressed peasantry, but was intolerable to the ruling class of the Middle Kingdom. The emperor, too weak to muster any resistance, instead fell upon the aid of the warlords of China. Though the warlords crushed the rebellion, once they had secured victory, they began battling against themselves for control of the throne. When the cruel despot Dong Zhou usurped the emperor in 189 AD, China officially entered the Three Kingdoms period, romanticized in China as a time of great heroes, dastardly villains, and various warlords all vying to create the next Chinese Dynasty. It was a time when any soldier with the means and will could make himself emperor of all China.

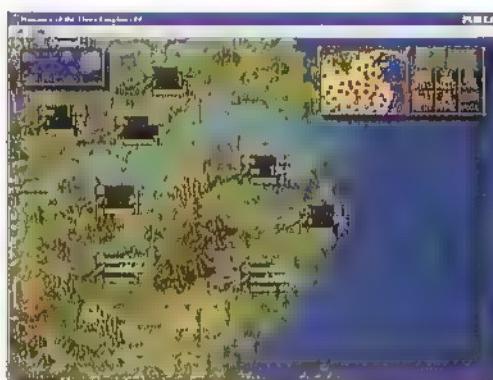
Price: \$59.95
System Requirements:
IBM compatible 386 or better 8 MB RAM, SVGA graphics, 12 MB hard drive space, 2x CD-ROM drive, Windows 3.x or Win 95, mouse; supports Windows compatible sound cards

of Players: 1-8 (hot-seat only)

Protection: None
Designer: Kou Shibusawa

Publisher: Koei Corporation, Burlingame, CA (415) 348-0500

Reader Service: #348



THE LAY OF THE LAND The game screen now has a beautiful SVGA map of China, buttons for the various commands, as well as customizable bars that show pertinent information for each province.

assume the role of one of a number of historical warlords as you try to unite the country. Since this period was replete with heroes, villains and a multitude of warlords, one of this series' best features is its historical accuracy: all the figures from history are here, right down to the lowliest and most treacherous of petty officials

category (e.g. 200 gold yields the most taxes). To increase the levels of these categories, you must put gold into these tasks and assign up to two generals to work on the given task.

These city chores are essential, because farming feeds your armies, dams prevent population and food loss, gold pays for the upkeep of your empire and armies, and technology allows you to build weapons of war, such as battering rams, catapults, and various crossbows.

External affairs in this game are all geared toward military victory. While you draft, train and outfit your armies, you can also engage in diplomacy and plots to weaken, deceive, or undermine your rivals. For instance, you can spread gossip in neighboring cities to lower the morale of enemy officers and ferment rebellion, commit arson against enemy granaries and weapons stockpiles, beseech barbarian raiders to invade your enemies on your behalf and conduct a great array of sneaky plots before you actually attack.



IMPERIAL DESIGNS
Koei's ROMANCE OF THE THREE KINGDOMS IV (ROMANCE IV) is a wargame set in the Second Century in China, where you

MONTHLY UPDATES The new City View shows all your tasks in progress, and also gives an update on the city tasks currently underway.

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your enemies

Quite a few new features make this game the best *ROMANCE* game yet. The inclusion of a city view, where you can view your domestic chores in progress, makes city management more accessible, rather than a simple spreadsheet command, and the addition of technology allows for some rather interesting new weapons.

Another feature is that all generals now have special abilities, in addition to their standard statistics (leadership, intelligence, and so on). Numbering over 40, these special abilities for combat and politics allow generals to set fires in combat, spy, build weapons, give added archery proficiency, and conduct myriad other

tasks. While every general can aid in city chores, in order to conduct external affairs and foreign plots, they must have the appropriate special ability or they will be unable to execute the desired command.

Combat in *ROMANCE IV* isn't very different from the earlier *Romance* games.

When you engage in battle, you can fight either in a castle battle, a field battle, or a naval battle. You can

command up to five armies, each led by a commander and up to two lieutenants.

Combat, which is turn-based, usually boils down to throwing your armies against the enemies, though you have the flexibility to employ various tactics, such as surrounding an enemy unit or picking it apart with archers.

The AI in the game is fairly competent. By selecting your warlords wisely, you can have an easier go at the game, but because there are so many rivals and so many lands to conquer, this game is definitely not an easy one to win. In combat, the computer opponents make intelligent

use of such special abilities as Confusion (which makes you attack an ally), Fire and other deadly tactics.

In the diplomatic arena, the AI is quite proficient at sharing its resources, building its powerbase and engaging in its own sneaky plots to weaken your lands.

ONE GIANT STEP FOR KOEI

The graphics in this game are a first for Koei: 256-color SVGA, and the game map you play upon is no longer a static map of China with colored squares. Instead, the map, which is actually too large to fit in one screen, is a large rendering of China that looks like a vibrant, classic Chinese painting. The game screen consists of a portion of the map, a box with the various available commands, and then a mini-map in the corner that shows the entire country, with an inset box that designates the portion of the map you are currently looking at. And this time, rather than being dull squares, cities are represented



SARDINES AT WAR In combat, you can choose to keep command of your own troops or delegate command to the computer.

as miniature walled cities.

The rest of the game has only decent graphics, and the game screens that come up during foreign plots and combat still look simple.

ANOTHER DYNASTY

If you are looking for anything fundamentally new or different in this series, you won't find it here. Those who don't know this series might find the excessive micro-management daunting. Those who liked the previous *ROMANCE* titles, though, will discover that this is the best *ROMANCE* game yet. The inclusion of new technology (and the resultant weapons), special abilities to generals, SVGA graphics and improved city management, not to mention a very catchy soundtrack, should be enough to entice old warlords back to the Three Kingdoms for another go at uniting the warring states of the Middle Kingdom.

APPEAL: Gamers who enjoy long, involving strategy games, and those who want to learn more about China's Middle Age history will appreciate this game.

PROS: Competent AI, better-than-usual-Koei graphics, a good soundtrack, accessible interface, and enhanced generals make this the best *ROMANCE* game so far.

CONS: The immense level of micro-management, the dry gameplay, and the dated spreadsheet design isn't enough to win new strategy gamers.



The Three Kingdoms

The Three Kingdoms is both an era in Chinese history and a popular Chinese novel, with the novel being a romanticized view of the period, with clear biases for and against certain characters. In the novel, which is fairly faithful to history, the main protagonists are Liu Bei and his two blood brothers, Zhang Fei and Guan Yu. The novel chronicles the fracturing of the Han dynasty and the rise of these three, especially Liu Bei, who eventually came to rule a third of China as an emperor of one of the Three Kingdoms. His chief rival, Cao Cao, the emperor of the Wei Kingdom, is depicted as a talented but ruthless and jealous warlord. He is clearly the villain, while Liu Bei's kingdom is depicted as the force for good. The Kingdom of Wu, ruled by Sun Quan, is neutral.

In the end, the novel follows history, as both the Shu and Wu kingdoms are defeated, and Liu Bei dies an unfulfilled death. His kingdom is ruined by his son's excesses, and Cao Cao's grandson, Cao Rui, eventually unifies all of China. He is then overthrown by one of his own generals, who establishes the new Jin Dynasty, which itself only lasted a few decades. Though the tale of the Romance of the Three

Kingdoms is a glorified chapter in Chinese history, it really was a tragic episode, in which a dynasty crumbled, and after years of fractious warfare, three kingdoms emerged to claim China as their own, only to crumble themselves after a few war-torn years.

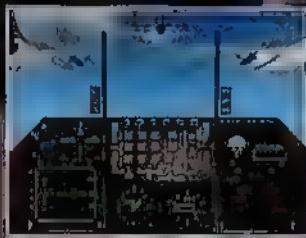
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MBA In A Box

Ruling A Corporate Empire Has Never Been More Fun

by Martin E. Cirulis



few months ago, while reviewing the disappointing *POWERHOUSE*, I was bemoaning the current state of "Tycoon" games, specifically the fact that most games in this category of late have been far too simple to be involving after the initial "setup" phase.

Once your corporation is established, you just sit back and micro-manage until your eyes roll back and your mouse-clicking finger goes numb. Well, the nice thing about the recent explosion of new computer game companies is that you don't have to wait long for another bus to come by, and this latest one is good enough to renew my faith in Tycoon games. *CAPITALISM* from Interactive Magic takes this dying little sub-genre and cranks the ante way up with a title that is definitely the *FALCON* of business simulators.

YOUR PRIMER, MR. IACOCCA

The first thing you notice about *CAPITALISM* is the utter lack of distracting frills. There are no whacky animations, no futuristic premise, no blowing up opponent's factories and absolutely no comedic attempts to make the game more appealing at the expense of content.

You start off in a land of a few cities and seaports with a scattering of undeveloped natural resources and an abundance of forest and farm land, mixed with a little mountain and desert. While detailed in terms of land value and environment characteristics, this map abstracts things like transportation routes and movement.

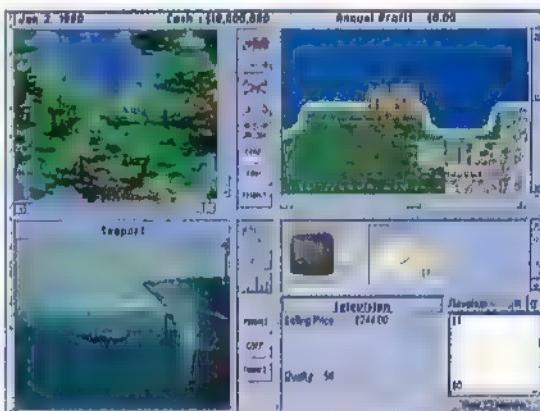
No cute trucks cruising around—but on the other hand, almost every bit of information you need to make important, realistic business decisions is at your disposal.

Not only is the information all there, but your freedom in choosing what to do with it is practically unlimited. While there are a series of fascinating scenarios that give you precise goals and time limits, the main gist of the game is an open-ended goal to survive and eventually dominate the territory markets in all categories, from resource markets to retail sales. You literally can start your empire

department stores, or raw materials for factories in the suburbs. Resource sites, like mines or farms, are situated in the wilderness between urban areas, but their output has to be linked to a city outlet in order to be sold. Increasing your market share to achieve a position of dominance in each city is the ultimate victory condition of an open game, but this is no easy thing. You not only have a number of country-wide corporations competing with you, but there can be local suppliers vying for the market in every city as well.

In the pursuit of this goal one has to consider the quality of the product, its popularity and reputation with consumers, the manufacturing costs and how much profit you are making per unit sold. You'll also have to decide whether to buy component materials from other companies or to try to manufacture everything needed yourself (an expensive proposition, considering a car requires a half-dozen components and at least two levels of manufacture, not to mention the establishment of mines and processing centers). And don't worry about the game limiting your production choices—from beer to motorcycles, there are dozens of products to choose from. Along the way, the program keeps track of all the small details including such subtleties as buyer recognition and employee training.

The major operational structure in *CAPITALISM* is The Firm. Each structure you build, be it oil rig or department store, is considered a separate firm and is composed of functional units in an interconnecting grid. To use the department store as an example: the first thing you do is buy some prime downtown real-estate, and in most other games, you'd be done—but



YOU'RE IN THE MONEY You manage a truly global economy; checking your imports at the local seaport is only one facet of your economic empire.

from a single electronics store or begin in the boonies with a chicken farm. This, combined with an abundance of variables and features, from opponent behavior to the presence of a stock-market, means business sim fans can work out corporate tactics for countless hours.

CLIMBING THE CORPORATE LADDER

CAPITALISM is really about product: how to manufacture, develop and sell it. Each city in the game represents a market, and goods are bought and sold in this marketplace as either finished product in



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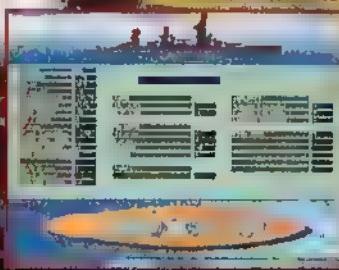
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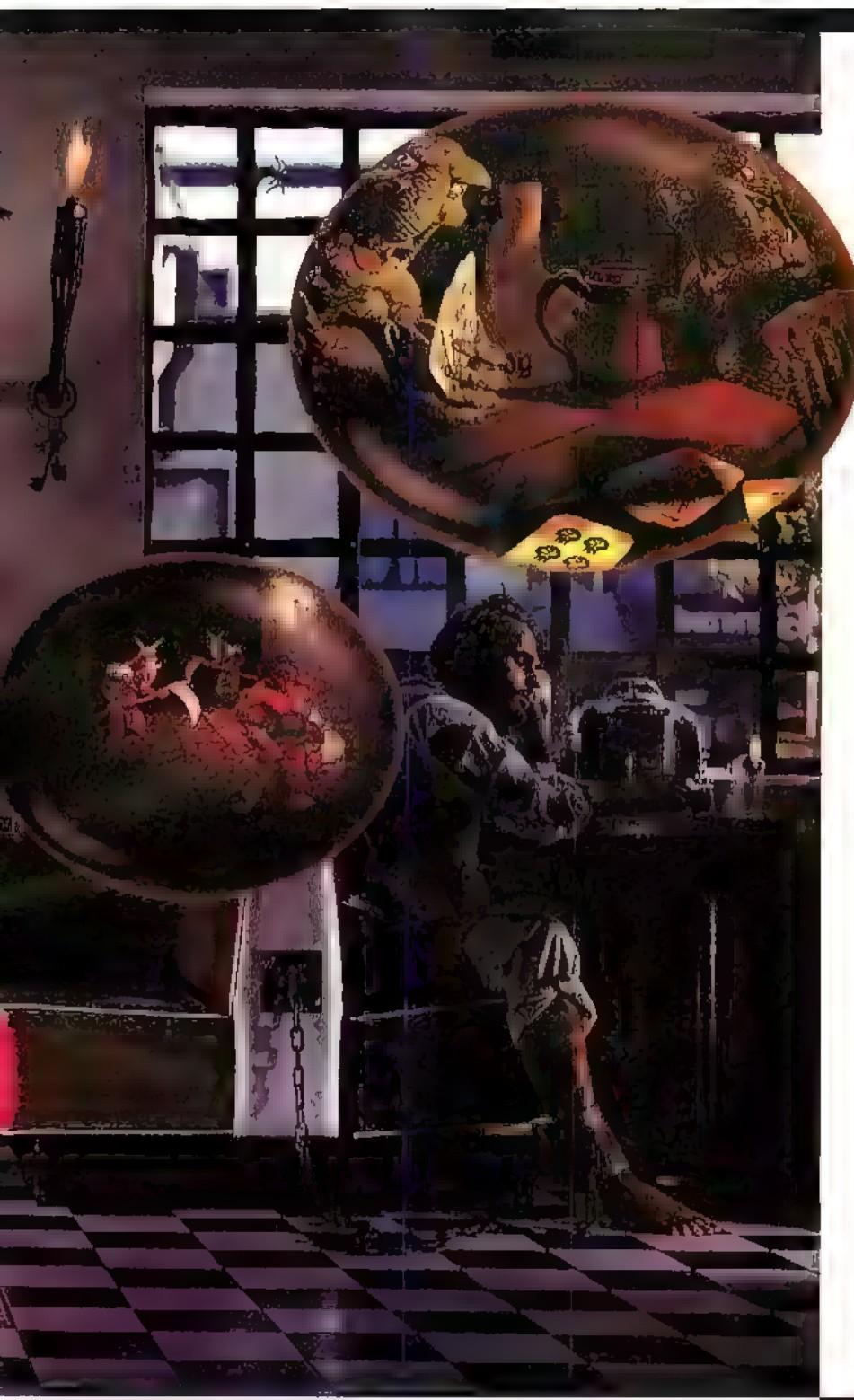
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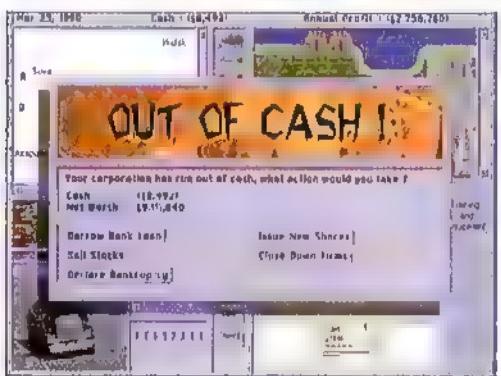


Technical Advisor William "Bud" Gruner commanded the submarine USS *Skate* during WWII, and was awarded the Navy Cross and the Silver Star. Commander Gruner provides narration of technical and tactical matters as well as personal anecdotes of his vast WWII experience.



not here, because all you have at the moment is an expensive, empty building. Next you must create the functional units in the firm that will create a hustle-bustle store full of profit-generating merchandise. So the first thing you do is hire a purchasing department and link it to some product, usually a dockside import. Once the shelves start to fill up you should purchase a marketing unit for the product you are buying, so that there is a staff on hand to take money from your marks...I mean "customers." If competition is a problem, perhaps it might be a good idea to purchase an advertising unit and link it to your troubled sales department. These steps must be repeated for every product being sold in the department store.

Eventually, you may want to manufacture your own products instead of reselling other companies' wares. You can set up a manufacturing firm to accomplish this; the purchasing units will gather raw materials, and then link to a manufacturing unit that can bring together two or three raw materials into a single product, which a sales unit can send to waiting retail outlets. And, if you feel like things aren't up to your standards yet, you can even create Research and Development firms that will improve your unit efficiency.



CHAPTER 11 The model in CAPITALISM is incredibly realistic, right down to the bankruptcy that awaits foolish executives.

ties and, eventually, product quality.

Luckily, before you get buried under the micro-management of all the separate firms in your growing empire, presidents can be hired for each firm. They will do a very good job of running things while you pay attention to the bigger picture.

While you are working out all of this

there are many things occurring around you in real time; most of them have to do with your competition. There is a straightforward stockmarket that is used vigorously by computer players, and a smart human player will keep an eye on how many public shares are being gobbled up by the competition. Stock prices vary realistically and are subject to pressure, not only from your performance but also by how active their trading is. Bank loans and stock dividends round out the financial battlefield.

The most sophisticated modeling occurs in the various consumer markets where you must even take into account the effect of putting your company's brand name on a product. If you have doubts about the quality of a new line of goods, it might be better to use a subsidiary name so your new, so-so radios don't drag down the reputation of your long-established PCs.

Unfortunately, all this depth comes with a price.

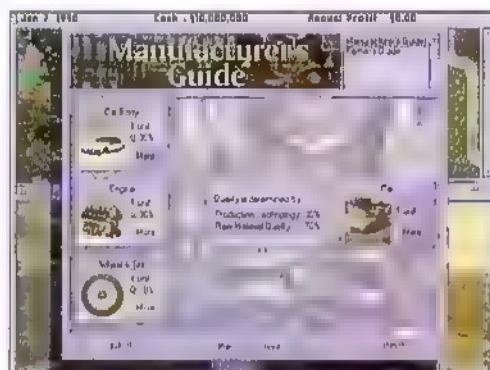
WALL OF CONFUSION

And that price is comprehensibility. CAPITALISM is an extremely hard game to master, and that's a shame, because it is a beautiful effort and the problem isn't really the fault of the design. The real demon here is just the vast amount of data that the player is expected to be able to absorb and react to. You have to handle so much information in the course of this game that minor flaws in presentation represent real obstacles to enjoyment. This is not a beginner's game by any means.

Even the refreshingly thick manual is burdened by the game's ambition. Though it is clear and concise, the sheer volume and complexity of the information presented can be daunting for even experienced gamers. This game is best digested and mastered in very small bites, and to its credit, the tutorial program is extensive and very modular, allowing

players to go back and cover a specific aspect again before launching a new enterprise.

The economic model here is a thing of true beauty and manages to continually challenge a player no matter what stage of the game they are in. The only technical fault I found was the fact that labor was overly-abstracted for such a detailed simu-



MODELING "T" Henry Ford started the mass production era, but you can one-up him with an even bigger and better manufacturing plan.

lation; real Magnates must deal with things like profit-threatening Unions and Daycare facilities.

For anyone with a love of the business world, this is easily a 5-star game and it has the same practical teaching value as Microsoft's FLIGHT SIM, but to be honest, this title could be a dry nightmare for the casual RAILROAD TYCOON player, and should be approached with caution. In the end, CAPITALISM is like the best Economics professors: brilliant and nearly incomprehensible. But if you are willing to put in the effort and study hard, a whole new world can open up for you. S

APPEAL: This is for serious gamers looking for hours of fun, or business-minded individuals with Fortune 500 dreams.

PROS: The best business simulation yet published with hundreds of hours of gameplay for the corporate enthusiast.

CONS: Dry, extremely complex, and the help functions, while extensive, are not as convenient as they need to be for a game of this magnitude.



Taming The Steel Panther

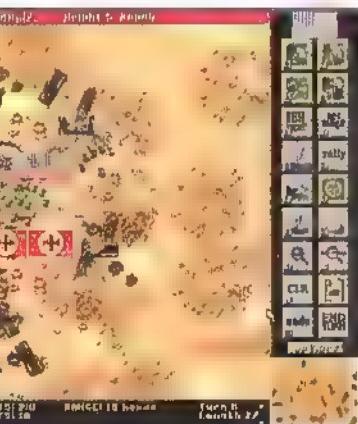
Take The Blitz Out Of The Blitzkrieg With These Tips And Tactics

by Patrick C. Miller

Orange flames and oily black smoke railed from more than a dozen shattered wrecks of German panzers littering the snowy plain. On a small hill, two American Jackson tank destroyers burned brightly, adding their glow to the fading light of the winter day and providing a grim reminder that the battle hadn't been totally one-sided. It was an unlikely setting for a meeting.

"Now what?" Sergeant Lewis asked nervously, his eyes scanning the wreckage that separated him from three German King Tiger heavy tanks.

"Take it easy," Staff Sergeant Miller replied. "Those Kraut tankers are more scared than we are right now. They're not about to come charging into a slaughterhouse where so many of their buddies bought it."



MINE, ALL MINE Mines are cheap and effective defensive weapons, and should be used to ring victory hexes. Don't forget to leave a back door for friendly forces, however.



SOUR KRAUTS You can pick apart German forces by taking their victory hexes and luring them after you into a prepared ambush.

"Yeah, but we couldn't do a hell of a lot about it if they did, with only our two tanks left and the lieutenant out of action," Lewis said, referring to the T26 Pershings he and Miller commanded. "I tell, I bounced so many shots off those Tigers that their crews are gonna have migraines for a week."

"At least I got one of them," Miller said. "Musta been a lucky turret ring hit. What I wouldn't give for a few more rounds of that HVAP ammo right now. You got any left?"

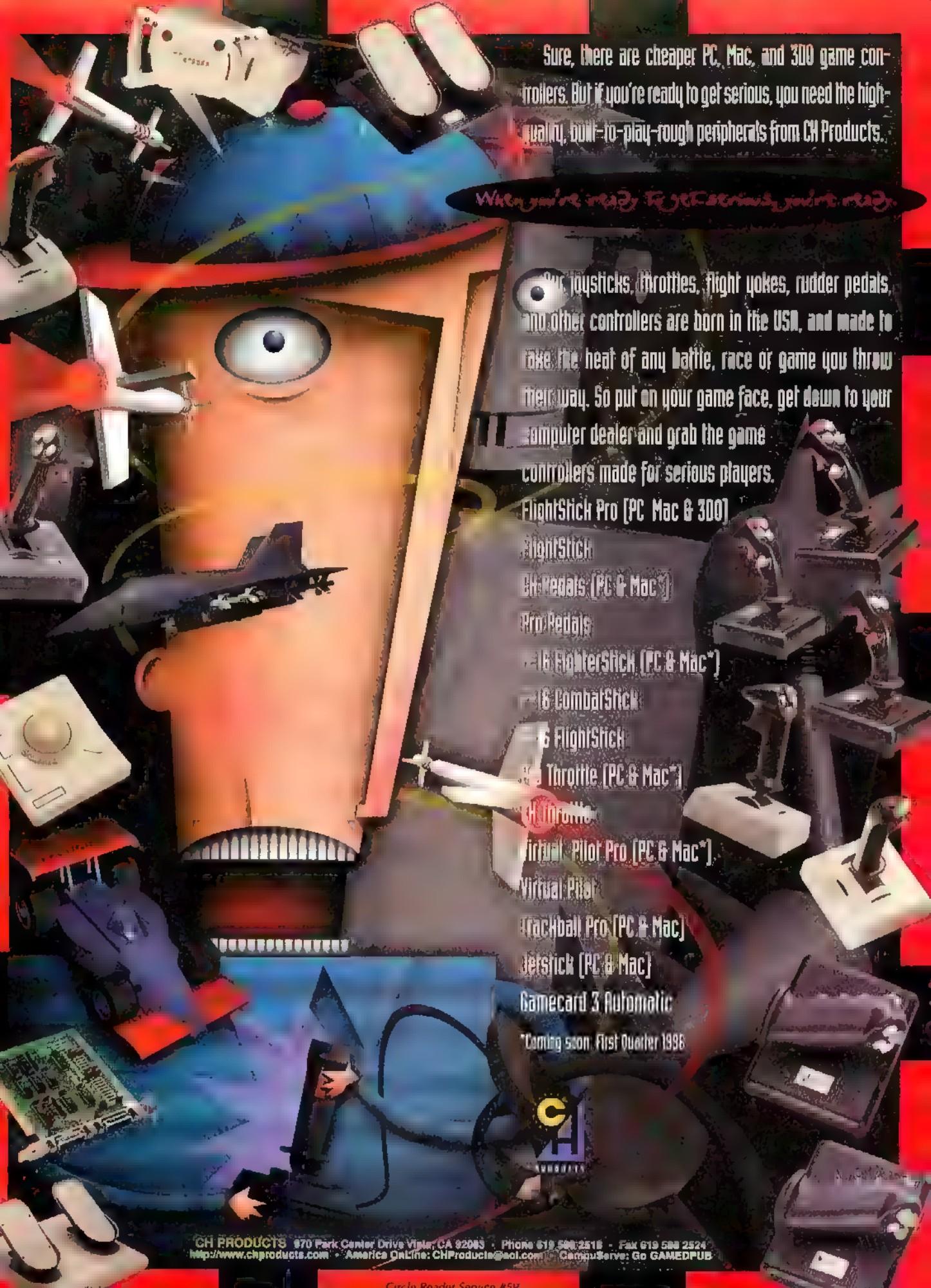
Lewis looked down. "Nah, I wasted the few I had on the Panthers."

"Hey, don't sweat it, I did the same thing," Miller said. Suddenly an idea came to him. "Get in your tank. I've got to get on the horn to second platoon. This ain't over yet," he said with a grin as he turned and scrambled up the side of his Pershing. Lewis pulled himself up the side of his metal monster, wondering what his buddy

had in mind.

In a long STEEL PANTHERS campaign, with the U.S. Army pitted against the German Wehrmacht, the American player must expect confrontations with armored fighting vehicles that have greater armor protection and far better guns. Last month's STEEL PANTHERS strategy article discussed the strategic aspects of a long American campaign beginning in North Africa and ending in Western Europe. This final part of the series covers tactics you can use to help your G.I.s emerge victorious, despite the qualitative edge possessed by the enemy.

To deal with superior enemy armor you must concentrate your force, hit the Germans with overwhelming firepower from close range and then outflank their vehicles to strike at vulnerable side and rear armor. In other words, you must



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employ surround-pound tactics. The Americans must take full advantage of cover and concealment to close with enemy armor, thereby improving the effectiveness of their guns and reducing the effectiveness of German armor. On the defensive, your units should make use of woods or the reverse slope of hills to screen themselves from enemy fire. On the offensive, take advantage of natural

An American Disaster: Can You Do Better?

The American attack on Sidi bou Zid, Tunisia, on February 15, 1943, is a classic study in how not to conduct offensive operations. Convinced they faced only a weak diversionary attack by the Afrika Korps, the Americans sent a tank battalion supported by tank destroyers, infantry and artillery to seize the small oasis village. Charging across 13 miles of open terrain in a parade-ground formation, relying on faulty intelligence and conducting no advanced reconnaissance, the U.S. force waltzed directly into a German trap.

Just outside Sidi bou Zid, the Americans encountered a steep-sided wadi (dry riverbed), an unplanned obstacle that forced them to split up their formation as they crossed it. Just as their tanks were beginning to emerge

from the dry riverbed, General Heinz Ziegler unleashed his panzers to first pin the American flanks and then hit them in the center with his main attack. When the battle ended, the Americans had lost 54 tanks, 57 half tracks and 29 guns.

A tactical situation based on the

battle at Sidi bou Zid was created using the Steel Panthers scenario editor. The scenario, which can be found in this issue's CG-ROM, starts with the Americans approaching the wadi outside Sidi bou Zid. After crossing the wadi, the U.S. units are attacked by the Germans before they can reorganize. When the main German attack hits the American center, superior gunnery gives the Afrika Korps the advantage. The Germans smash the American main attack and cross the wadi to mop up what remains of the U.S. force.

Can you do better than the American commander at Sidi bou Zid? Play this scenario from the cover disk and send your winning solution to us. The three best solutions will win a one-year subscription to *Computer Gaming*.

cover and concealment while advancing. In desert or flat terrain, make liberal use of smoke screens.

In real-world warfare, a key to success is knowing and exploiting the enemy's tendencies. Because in this case the enemy is controlled by more predictable artificial intelligence (AI), your job is considerably easier. The computer

AI is generally better at defending than attacking. However, even in scenarios in which the Germans are defending, you can send them into attacking by seizing some of their victory hexes. This nearly always triggers a counterattack, a flaw you can exploit by setting up an ambush to destroy the enemy units piecemeal as they charge into the victory hex area.

TANK IT TO THE LIMIT

The old adage "grab 'em by the nose and kick 'em in the rear," typified American armor tactics in World War II. Indeed, perhaps the most important tactical concept for commanding American armor in *STEEL PANTHERS* is that of envelopment, or the ability to keep enemy tanks occupied to their front, while other tanks wrap around their flanks. To avoid suffering heavy losses before you complete your envelopment, it's important that you first win the battle of suppression. The more suppression points you can pile on the German tanks, the less accurate their fire and the less likely they'll be able to respond to the threat on their flanks.

Firing the first shots in a tactical engagement is good,



FIELD OF FIRE Tanks deployed on the reverse slope of a hill can see the top of the hill (highlighted area), but little else. Use infantry squads to watch for enemy units.

and getting the first kill is even better because it means enemy units will receive suppression points before yours do. Ideally, your tanks should be stationary and shooting from close range into a small field of fire, enabling two or more of your tanks to gang up on each German tank. Create an effective killing zone by lining up your tanks along the back side of an objective area in woods on a reverse slope. Place two tanks in each hex to double the volume of firepower. As enemy vehicles enter this zone and are either knocked out, immobilized or heavily suppressed, other American tanks should work their way to one or both flanks to deliver the coup de grace.

GRUNT WORK

Infantry plays a less glamorous but



TURNING THE TABLES Use of aircraft, for reconnaissance and bombing, as well as mobile artillery, is essential to turning the German forces.



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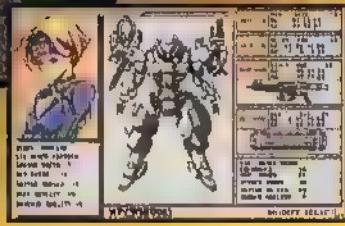
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important role in every battle. On the offensive, each lead tank or AFV should always carry an infantry squad to protect it from ambush by enemy infantry and to assist in spotting enemy units. Dismount your infantry five or six hexes short of a defensive position and have it precede the armored vehicles into an objective area to locate mines, dug-in traps and anti-tank guns. This is often hard on the infantry, but infantry losses during a campaign are far easier to replace than AFVs and their experienced crews.

During defensive missions, infantry deployed around or in victory hex areas, especially when equipped with bazookas, satchel charges or flame throwers, can prove lethal to attacking enemy AFVs. Infantry small-arms fire will also suppress armored vehicles, reducing their combat effectiveness. Because German infantry is well-equipped with anti-tank weaponry from 1943 on, the American infantry's greatest challenge is keeping enemy troops away from U.S. armor.

ON THE WAY, SIR!

The Americans are blessed with a wide variety of artillery and there's usually plenty of it, ranging from offshore ships to off-map artillery batteries to on-map, self-propelled artillery units.

Artillery is almost a necessity for offensive missions, where it can lay smoke screens to cover an advance and bombard known or suspected enemy positions ahead of an attack. Off-map artillery is available only for assault missions, but you can and should buy a few sections of M7 Priests (105mm) or M12 GMC's (155mm) for advance missions. These

self-propelled artillery units are extremely useful vehicles because they can serve not only as indirect fire artillery, but also in the direct-fire mode, where their large-caliber, high-explosive shells wreak havoc



SURROUND AND POUND Maneuvering tanks for flank shots on German armor is a key part of being successful with the Americans.

on soft targets.

The trick to successfully using artillery is to get it on target as quickly and accurately as possible. Although any unit can call in and spot for artillery, leader units usually experience shorter delays. Your overall command unit (AO) often gets artillery support more quickly than its sub-

ordinate commanders. One method available to get artillery fire with no turn delays is to use the command unit of an on-map self-propelled artillery section to call in the fire. The subordinate unit in the section will fire with a one-turn delay. By firing several sections in this manner, it's possible to lay down a withering artillery barrage very quickly.

Although artillery bombardment can be plotted on untargeted hexes, it's generally far more accurate when the unit calling for the fire can also see the target hex. In addition, the higher the artillery command rating of the spotting unit, the more accurate the hit will be. If you have infantry units as part of your core force, check the artillery command ratings of their leaders. A leader unit with an exceptional rating makes an excellent forward observer.

THE AIR APPARENT

In World War II, air support was often the U.S. Army's ace in the hole. However,

in *Steel Panthers*, even though close-support aircraft are more readily available to the Americans than other nationalities, getting effective use from them can be problematic. Plotting an air strike within eight to ten hexes of friendly ground units can sometimes cause damage to your own units. If you do want air support, perhaps the best ground attack aircraft available for any nationality is the American P-38 Lightning, a potent killer of tanks and light armor with its rockets, cannon and machine guns.

Aircraft are best used in offensive missions where they can soften up defensive positions and perform limited reconnaissance. One effective tactic is to use air support in conjunction with artillery. Send in a lone aircraft well ahead of your ground attack and make note of the enemy units the plane spots, anti-aircraft guns in particular. Hit the anti-aircraft units with artillery so that your aircraft can run later bombing raids with impunity. Anti-tank guns and infantry revealed by

Attack Strength Modifiers		
Terrain	Circumstance	Modifier
Hard Cover	Dug-in	x 1/8
Hard Cover	Positioned or pinned	x 1/4 (1/8 vs. small arms)
Soft Cover	Dug-in infantry	x 1/6
Soft Cover	Dug-in gun	x 1/4
Soft Cover	Positioned or pinned	x 1/3
Clear	Dug-in infantry	x 1/4
Clear	Dug-in gun	x 1/3
Clear	Pinned	x 1/2
Clear	Moved > 1 hex	x 2

NOTE: If a unit is dug-in and has not fired for one turn, then small arms fire is multiplied by 1/6 against that unit (this is in addition to all other modifiers shown above).

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Watch for the full 3D-level version coming this March.

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your planes should also be targeted for artillery bombardment.

MINE OVER MATTER

Mines are most likely encountered on assault missions and can quickly bring your offensive to a grinding halt. Therefore, when buying support units prior to an assault, you should buy at least three sections of Sherman engineering vehicles and two or more platoons of engineers. Deploy your engineering vehicles in a line abreast at the head of your force with an engineer squad riding on each vehicle. The remainder of your force should follow closely in the tracks of the lead vehicles. The engineering vehicles are far more likely to detect mines and can immediately dismount their engineer squads to begin clearing them. Having an engineer squad and a crib tank in the same hex will significantly speed up your mine-clearing operation.

On the defensive, mines are cheap and extremely effective weapons. If mines are

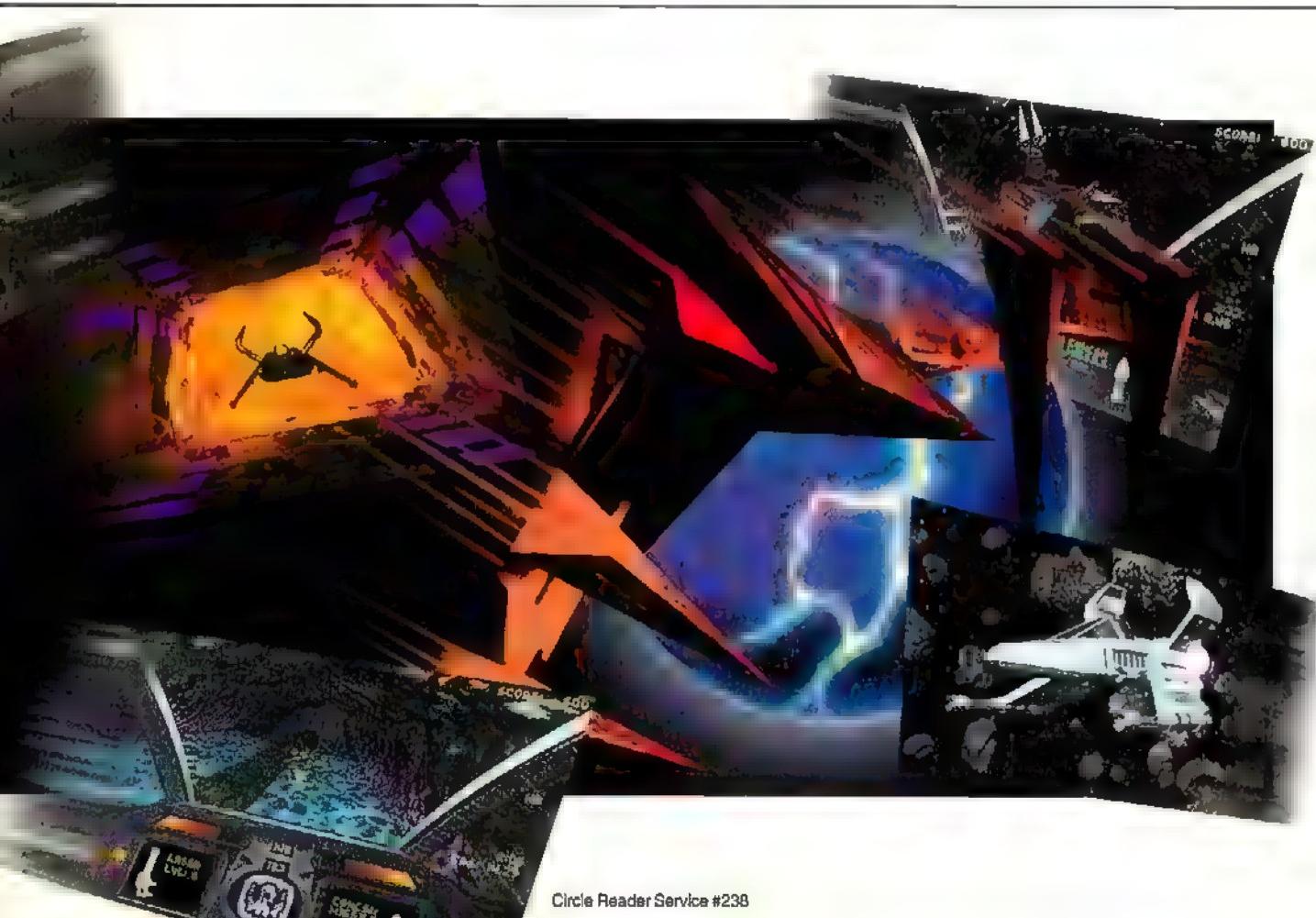
available for your mission, they can be purchased as miscellaneous support units at a cost of five points for every ten mines. Placing two or three mines per hex around the outside edges of a victory hex area will usually produce very favorable results as enemy troops and vehicles will inevitably flock to these areas. You can also place mines along the enemy's most likely attack routes to serve as early warning devices and whittle down the attack before it reaches your defensive line.

To fight and win as an American in STEEL PANTHERS, you must learn to exploit the advantages the U.S. possessed during the war

Tanks might be the queen of battle in this game, but they are far more effective when their efforts are coordinated with artillery, air, engineering and infantry support, all areas in which the Americans are equal or better than other nationalities.



► **V FOR VICTORY** Though achieving victory is much more difficult for the Americans early on, intelligent tactics can even the tide in later battles.



Three Sherman and two Pershing tanks slowly made their way through the smoke and wreckage of the German armored vehicles. As each tank spotted the King Tigers hunkered down on the vital crossroads, they halted and opened fire. The Tiger turrets slowly turned to acquire targets. Flames belched from their guns in response to the American tanks, but badly shaken from the sudden attack, they missed.

Preoccupied with the vehicles to their front, the German tankers failed to notice a single American tank destroyer advancing on their exposed right flank. The M36 Jackson halted, took aim and fired a high-velocity 90mm round that easily pierced the side armor of the heavy tank's turret, causing its ammunition to explode. Before the Germans realized the danger, a second Tiger was smoking heavily and its crew bailed out.

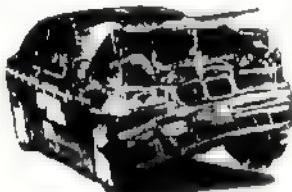
The last King Tiger lumbered toward a clump of trees in search of concealment, a fatal mistake. One hit on the vulnerable rear armor struck the engine. With smoke pouring from it, the tank ground to a halt, caught fire and blew up. The path

to the objective was now clear and the American armor surged forward. The campaign begun by Miller's Marauders in the deserts of North Africa had finally come to a decisive and victorious end.

U.S. and German Infantry Weapons

Name	Nation	HE	AP Pen.	HEAT	Range	Accuracy
Pistol	Both	2	0	0	2	1
Semi-Auto Rifle	U.S.	2	0	0	10	5
Rifle	Ger.	1	0	0	10	4
Sub MG	Both	4	0	0	4	4
BAR	U.S.	4	0	0	10	8
.30 Cal. Med. MG	U.S.	12	0	0	16	10
.30 Cal. Hvy. MG	U.S.	16	0	0	18	12
.50 Cal. Hvy. MG	U.S.	14	3	0	20	15
MG-34 LL. MG	Ger.	8	0	0	10	8
MG-34 Med. MG	Ger.	14	0	0	18	12
MG-42 Med. MG	Ger.	16	0	0	18	12
Flame Thrower	Both	10	0	14	1	0
Satchel Charge	Both	12	2	15	1	0
Hand Grenade	Both	4	0	0	1	0
Bazooka	U.S.	4	0	14	6	2
Panzerfaust	Ger.	0	0	20	2	1
Panzerschreck	Ger.	0	0	15	4	2

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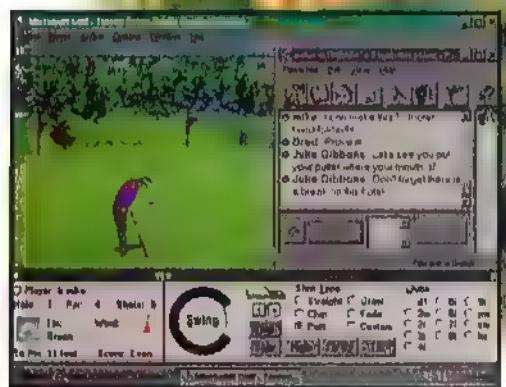
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WHERE DO YOU WANT TO GO TODAY?

For more information on Golf 2.0 and PlayerNet, log onto <http://www.microsoft.com/megolf>.

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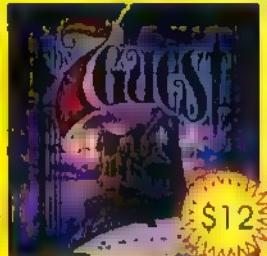
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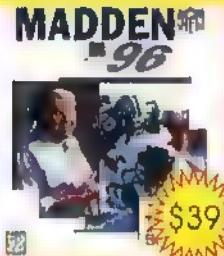
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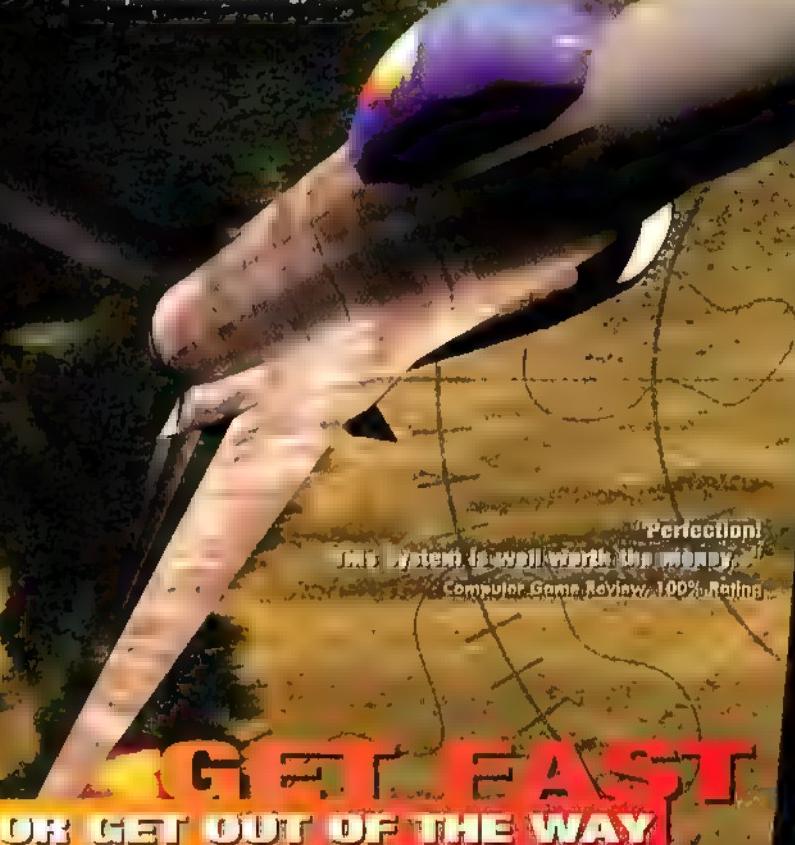
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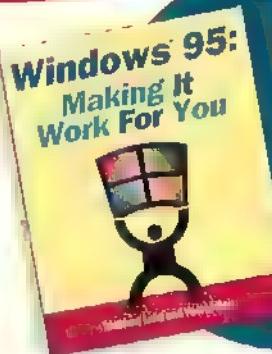
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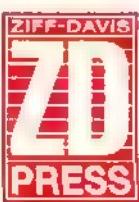
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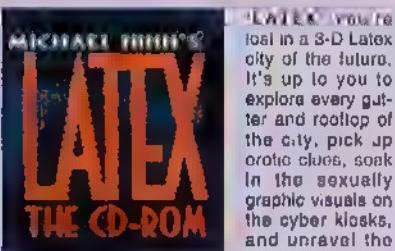
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IBM STILLS

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Climb Behind The Wheel

Controllers To Help Tame The Savage Beast

by Gordon Goble

INDYCAR RACING II is the first racing sim I've encountered where I honestly must say that a good joystick just won't do. For years it's been me and my trusty sidekick, the CH FlightStick, together through the streets of Monaco and on the hallowed bricks at Indy. However, new and potentially deadly tracks such as INDYCAR II's Australia demand the precision and extra throw of a solid wheel and separate pedals.

COMPETITION DRIVING SYSTEM

I've had the pleasure of putting a few wheel/pedal combos

through their paces, and without a doubt the premier unit is Extreme Competition Controls' Competition Driving System. At \$439, the price tag is high, but so is the quality in this professionally-appointed, nearly all metal unit.

A varnished wheel, on-the-wheel shifter and a rock solid base highlight the steering unit. The pedals are perfectly angled to fit a racing posture, with a slightly heavier brake than accelerator. This baby is noiseless, with none of that annoying springiness of other wheels.

My lower lap times (particularly on road courses) and undamaged cars attest to its capabilities. You won't find this baby at your local computer superstore, though—you'll have to contact the manufacturer to buy one, at (612) 824-6733.

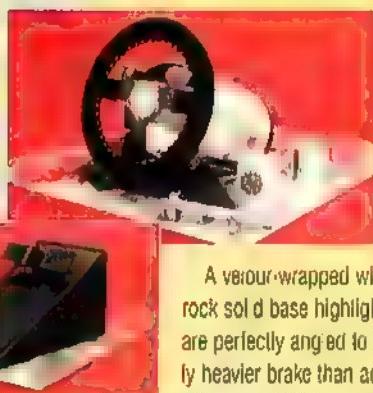
FORMULA T2

Thrustmaster recently introduced its latest Formula product, the

T2 wheel and pedal combo. While it's not up to the precision and awesome feel of the Competition Driving

System, it is substantially lower priced and a step ahead of the "let's drive a truck" Formula T1.

Noteworthy improvements include a smaller, thicker wheel more befitting racing games and rubber pedals instead of those odd little rollers on the original. Personally, I don't like the idea of a separate shifter—it requires that I take my hands off the wheel—but the unit performs pretty well. Once I'd become accustomed to that darn shifter, I felt I had a much better grip on the situation than a joystick could provide.



Extreme Competition Controls' Competition Driving System



Thrustmaster's Formula T2

CH PEDALS

Racers who picked up the original CH Pro Pedals were none too happy when they discovered the fore-aft motion designed into the unit for airplane rudder control just wouldn't go away when

on the track. CH came up with a solution, a pair of chocks that jammed unwanted movement. A few months ago CH introduced a better solution for racing fans: the less expensive CH Pedals, which have no fore-aft capabilities whatsoever, just normal car pedal movement. Finally, good, cheap pedals.

Racing addicts may want to look elsewhere, as the CH Pedals angle of attack is not complementary with the position you sit in to use most control wheels, but more casual gamers playing with joysticks and sitting in a pseudo-secretarial posture should be just fine.

G-FORCE

More flight yoke than racing wheel, Suncom's G-Force nevertheless performs just great with World Circuit and INDYCAR, but a little less so in the ultra-realistic INDYCAR II. Featuring a swiveling column for fore/aft axis control and a U-shaped yoke handle that pivots at the base and arcs

from side to side, the G Force loses some necessary precision simply because it moves in four directions. Yet it's a decent

starter, and the built-in locking mechanism effectively prevents fore/aft movements if and when pedals are added to the system.



CH Pedals



CH Virtual Pilot

VIRTUAL PILOT

The CH Virtual Pilot is yet another flight yoke that adapts for driving games. Unlike the G-Force, the Virtual Pilot's wheel attaches to its housing via a rotating shaft that pulls back and pushes forward. Unfortunately, this accelerator and braking motion is definitely far too clunky for advanced sims, and serious racers would be advised to stick with a good joystick or, ideally, move up to a full-blown wheel/pedal combo.

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HALL OF FAME

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the records, established the benchmarks, and held gamers in delighted trances for hours untold.

INDUCTION CEREMONY

BETRAYAL AT KRONDOR

DYNAMIX 1993

Come ye, one and all. We do hereby induct Betrayal at Krondor (BAK) into this august collection of classics. Raymond E. Feist's world of fantasy came to life in BAK. True to its roots as a world created for gaming, the universe described in Feist's best-selling books became, once again, a world where characters could move, explore and define their own stories. BAK was full of side-quests and story/character-building encounters. Even using old technology, the game would probably have been a success. As it was, BAK was the first role-playing game to offer a 3-D environment and, though the pop-up paperdoll cutout characters may not hold up to today's production values, it was one of the first games to use digitized images effectively in the context of a role playing game. Though initial sales of the game were slower than expected, fans of the Feist novels soon discovered that the universe had been handled thoughtfully, and even those who hadn't heard of the novels found that BAK offered a remarkable fantasy experience. So, BAK became a benchmark for computer role-playing games, and in fact dominated the top slot among role playing games for a full year, since February of '95.



ALONE IN THE DARK

I-MOTION 1992

ALONE IN THE DARK has earned a place in the Hall of Fame because of its creative use of 3-D technology to place gamers within a chilling adventure game context. Its ancestor (released in this country as OUT OF THIS WORLD) proved that 3-D technology was useful for cinematic action games, but ALONE IN THE DARK (AITD) took the experience to another level. AITD combines a Lovecraftian environment with a sense of urgency by placing a 3-D character in the midst of an inexplicable incursion of the internal. Through atmospheric pacing, camera angles and innovative combat modeling, the game becomes more immersive and more challenging as the player advances. I-Motion was also innovative in using line of sight and maneuvering around objects as an integral part of the experience. Many gamers felt AITD was the most realistic experience they had encountered in an adventure game. For attention to movement, perspective, camera angles, story and play balance, we recognize AITD as worthy to stand with the great games of all time.



Inductees After 1989

FALCON 3.0

(Spectrum HoloByte, 1991)

GUNSHIP

(MicroProse, 1989)

RED BARON

(Dynamix, 1990)

SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION

(MicroProse, 1991)

HARPOON

(Three-Sixty Pacific, 1989)

THEIR FINEST HOUR

(LucasArts, 1989)

KING'S QUEST V

(Sierra On-Line, 1990)

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND

(LucasArts, 1990)

LEMMINGS

(Psygnosis, 1991)

ULTIMA VI

(Origin Systems, 1990)

LINKS 386 PRO

(Access Software, 1992)

ULTIMA UNDERWORLD

(Origin Systems, 1992)

M-1 TANK PLATOON

(MicroProse, 1989)

WING COMMANDER I & II

(Origin Systems, 1990-91)

RAILROAD TYCOON

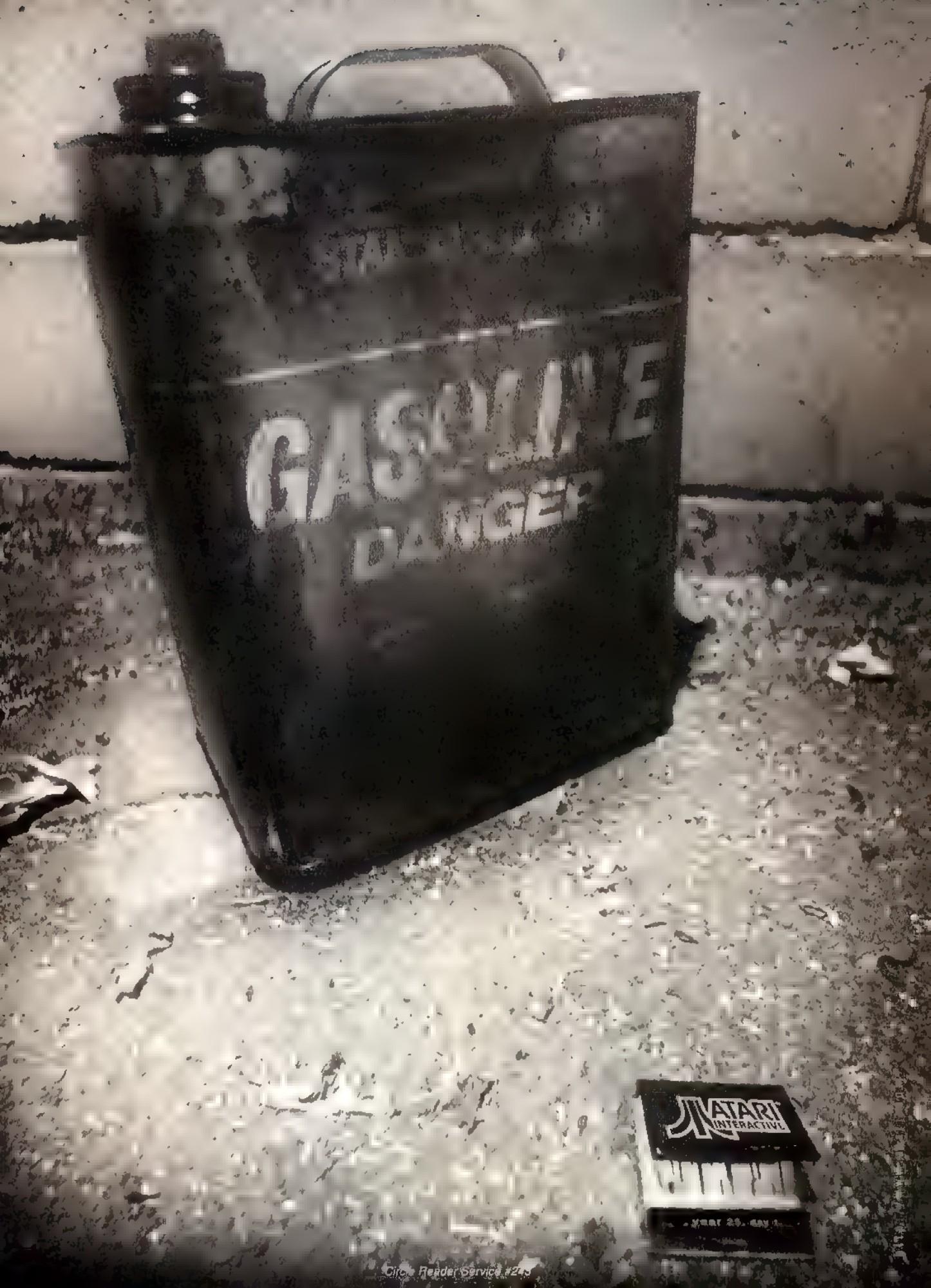
(MicroProse, 1990)

WOLFENSTEIN 3-D

(id Software, 1992)

Inductees Prior To 1989

BATTLE CHESS (Interplay Productions, 1988)
CHESSMASTER (The Software Toolworks, 1986)
EARL WEAVER BASEBALL (Electronic Arts, 1986)
EMPIRE (Interstel, 1978)
F-18 STEALTH FIGHTER (MicroProse, 1988)
GETTYSBURG: THE TURNING POINT (SSI, 1986)
KAMPFGRUPPE (Strategic Simulations, 1985)
MECH BRIGADE (Strategic Simulations 1985)
MIGHT & MAGIC (New World Computing, 1986)
M.U.L.E. (Electronic Arts, 1989)
PIRATES (MicroProse, 1987)
SIMCITY (Maxis, 1987)
STARFLIGHT (Electronic Arts, 1986)
THE BARD'S TALE (Electronic Arts, 1985)
ULTIMA III (Origin Systems 1983)
ULTIMA IV (Origin Systems, 1985)
WAR IN RUSSIA (Strategic Simulations, 1984)
WASTELAND (Interplay Productions, 1986)
WIZARDRY (Si-Tech Software, 1981)
ZORK (Infocom, 1981)



City Render Service #24

Computer game programs have grown so massive and the number of hardware configurations has become so huge that incompatibilities and glitches are frustratingly common.

ZDNet

These patches can usually be downloaded from the major online networks (CompuServe, GEnie, ZDNet) and Computer Gaming World's Web Site (<http://www.zdnet.com/~gaming>), but can also be obtained from individual software publisher's BBSes or direct from the publisher with proof of purchase.

Publisher BBS Numbers

Many of these patches are available directly from the publishers' bulletin board systems. Call with your modem parity settings at N-8-1

Accolade (408) 296-8800
Apogee (508) 368-7036
Bethesda (301) 990-7552
Blizzard (714) 556-4602
Broderbund (415) 883-5889
Capstone (305) 374-6872
Creative Labs (405) 742-6660
Id Software (508) 368-4137
Impressions (617) 225-2042
InterPlay (714) 252-2822
LucasArts (415) 257-3070
Maxis (510) 254-3869
MicroProse (410) 785-1841
Microsoft (206) 936-6735
NovaLogic (818) 774-9528
Origin (512) 328-8402
Papyrus (617) 576-7472
Sierra Online (206) 644-0112
Spectrum HaloByte (510) 522-8909
SSI (408) 739-6137 or (408) 739-6623
Virgin Interactive (714) 833-3305

Software fixes, or "patches," for buggy programs have become a necessary evil until we reach the golden age of standardized platforms and bug-free programs. Red indicates new files.

Advanced Civilization V1.01

Update: Fixes many small problems and the Windows 95 city construction problem. 11/29/95

Apache Update: Addresses problems with the preferences screen and with Invincible mode. This patch does not address the modem problems. 10/24/95

Buried in Time: Includes new 16-bit Windows executables fixes the exploding wall problem in Chateau Gaillard and the Alien Halfway lockup; portions have also been enhanced for better performance. 10/11/95

CivNet Update: Fixes several reported problems. 12/8/95

Command & Conquer V1.18P

Patch: Includes fixes for all known bugs to date and some game balance changes. 11/27/95

Dawn Patrol: Includes new SVGA drivers for Trident video cards, as well as an updated flight model. 10/4/95

Dungeon Master 2 Sound Fix:

Patches both the demo and the retail version. 7/29/95

Flight Commander 2 V1.04 Update:

Fixes some reported errors. 10/11/95

Flight Unlimited V2.0:

Contains two physics fixes, two video fixes, fixes a couple of controller bugs, a mouse driver problem, and adds total energy compensation to the Grob's variometer. 8/30/95

Hardball 5 v5.12 Update: Fixes errant force-outs, problems preventing customized slot selections. 12/5/95

Harpoon 2 V1.01 PowerMach

Update: Fixes some reported problems. 10/26/95

Heroes of Might and Magic V1.2 Update:

Fixes some problems with connecting via modem and some random crash problems. 10/24/95

Lords of Midnight Update:

Provides multiple fixes to Domark's RPG/strategy game. 9/5/95

Hive Update: Makes the game easier. 12/4/95

MechWarrior 2 DOS Version V1.1 Update:

Fixes several things, including the right side taking more damage on mechs, increased joystick support and Windows 95 crash problems. 11/20/95

NHL 96 Update:

Fixes a variety of technical problems, including playoff lock-ups or problems with saving playoff games to hard disk. 12/2/95

Panthers in the Shadows

V1.12 Update: Fixes all known problems with the release version and adds several new features. 10/17/95

Road From Sumter to Appomattox Update:

Corrects retreat rule problems, allows Confederate recruiting in Kentucky and Missouri. 12/8/95

Rebel Assault for Macintosh Update:

Helps correct random lockups; also provides native support for Power Macs. 11/24/95

Riddle of Master Lu Update:

Removes the 100 room limitation which causes the "Fatal Error" and others near the end of the game. This patch will work with your current saved games. 10/27/95

Stalingrad Update V1.85:

Fixes reported problems. PC and Macintosh versions available. 8/25/95

Steel Panthers V1.1 Update:

Fixes several reported bugs. 10/23/95

Tigers on the Prowl V1.26:

Fixes all known problems and improves some AI functions; may be used to upgrade any previous version of TOP. 10/19/95

Ultimate Football '95 CD

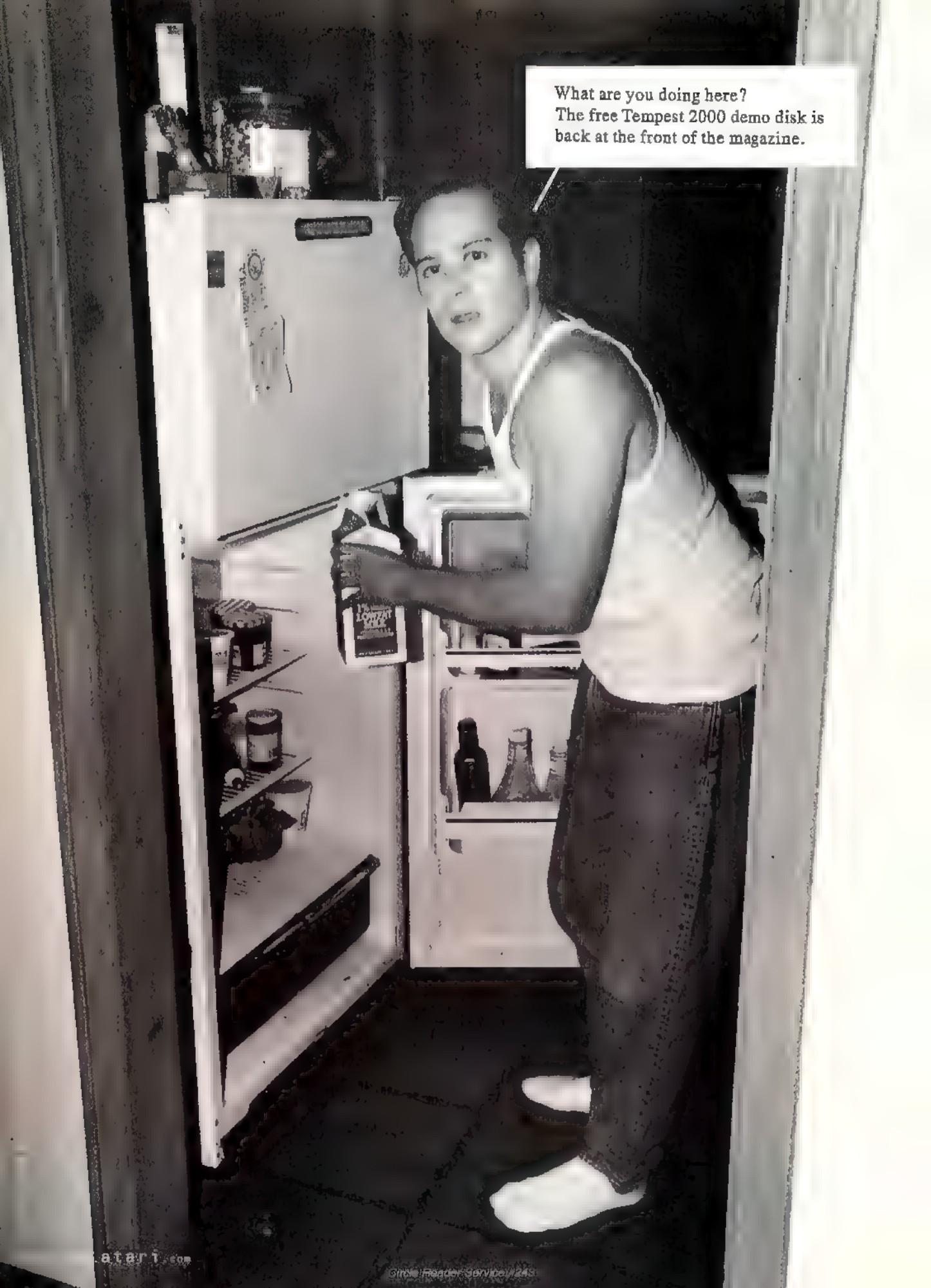
Update: Corrects the "CD not found" problem. 10/19/95

Virtual Pool IRQ Update:

Allows any version of Virtual Pool to use IRQ 10 and above. 11/1/95

Warlords II Deluxe V2.2.4:

Fixes multiple problems. 11/10/95



What are you doing here?
The free Tempest 2000 demo disk is
back at the front of the magazine.

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Dan Bennett, PC Gamer

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Neil West, Next Generation



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FADE TO BLACK



THE NEED FOR SPEED

THE COMPUTER GAMING POLL • A MONTHLY SURVEY OF THE READERS OF COMPUTER GAMING



You've read our take on the latest games, now here's a chance to see what your fellow gamers think. The CG Top 100 is a monthly tally of game ratings provided by our readers via the CG Poll ballot found in each issue. Approximately 50 games are rated each month, and the results are added to the aggregate results from past months. This historical database serves as a terrific reference for what you, the gamers, feel are the best plays in gaming.

TOP ACTION GAMES

NAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1 Crusader: No Remorse	OrIGIN	10.26
2 DOOM	id Software	10.24
3 DOOM II	id Software	9.77
4 Dark Forces	LucasArts	9.70
5 Virtual Pool	Interplay	9.52
6 Magic Carpet	Electronic Arts	9.48
7 System Shock	Origin	9.19
8 The Need For Speed	Electronic Arts	9.16
9 Heretic	id Software	9.08
10 Descent	Interplay	8.86

TOP ADVENTURE GAMES

NAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1 Full Throttle	LucasArts	9.44
2 Gabriel Knight	Sierra	9.42
3 Sam & Max Hit The Road	LucasArts	9.33
4 Woodluff & Schnibble	Sierra	9.28
5 Relentless	Electronic Arts	9.12
6 Ecstatica	Psygnosis	9.09
7 Phantasmagoria	Sierra	9.07
8 Under A Killing Moon	Access	9.04
9 Legend of Kyrandia 3	Virgin	8.94
10 Star Trek: TNG, Final Unity	Spectrum HoloByte	8.75

TOP CLASSIC/PUZZLE GAMES

NAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1 Incredible Toons	Dynamix	8.86
2 Incredible Machine 2	Sierra	8.85
3 Zig Zag	QOP	8.29
4 Clockwerk	Spectrum HoloByte	8.25
5 Hodj n' Podj	Virgin	8.18
6 Power Poker	Electronic Arts	7.83
7 Shanghai-Greatest Moments	Activision	7.75
8 Lemmings Chronicles	Psygnosis	7.47
9 Multimedia Celebrity Poker	New World Computing	7.28
Bridge Olympiad	QOP	7.28

TOP SIMULATION/SPACE COMBAT GAMES

NAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1 Wing Commander 3	Origin	10.57
2 TIE Fighter	LucasArts	10.26
3 MechWarrior 2	Activision	10.08
4 NASCAR Racing	Papyrus	10.01
5 U.S. Marine Fighters	Electronic Arts	9.80
6 U.S. Navy Fighters	Electronic Arts	9.60
7 Wings of Glory	Origin	9.56
8 Flight Unlimited	Looking Glass	9.51
9 Indy Car Racing	Papyrus	9.43
10 Aces of the Deep	Dynamix	9.38

TOP SPORTS GAMES

NAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1 NBA Live '95	Electronic Arts	9.86
2 Front Page Sports Football 95	Sierra	9.64
3 PGA Tour Golf '96	Electronic Arts	8.93
4 Front Page Sports Baseball	Dynamix	8.76
5 Hardball IV	Accolade	8.70
6 Tony LaRussa 3	SSI	8.12
7 Ultimate Football '95	MicroProse	7.75
8 Microsoft Golf 2.0	Microsoft	7.43
9 Ultimate Football	MicroProse	7.26
10 Unnecessary Roughness	Accolade	6.95

TOP STRATEGY GAMES

NAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1 X-COM	MicroProse	10.37
2 Command & Conquer	Virgin	9.97
3 Jagged Alliance	Sir-Tech	9.81
4 Heroes of Might & Magic	New World Computing	9.72
5 Master of Magic	MicroProse	9.66
6 Warcraft	Blizzard	9.64
7 X-COM: Terror from the Deep	MicroProse	9.38
8 Merchant Prince	QOP	9.08
9 VGA Planets	Tim Wissman	9.00
10 The Grandest Fleet	QOP	8.96

TOP ROLE PLAYING GAMES

NAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1 Might & Magic: Clouds of Xeen	New World Computing	9.07
2 Ravenloft: Stone Prophet	SSI	8.98
3 Arena: The Elder Scrolls	Bethesda	8.83
4 Wolf	Sanctuary Woods	8.64
5 Menzoberranzan	SSI	8.26
6 Ravenloft	SSI	8.16
7 Mordor	TDA	8.00
8 Dark Sun: Wake of the Ravager	SSI	7.64
9 Thunderscape	SSI	7.63
10 Dungeon Hack	SSI	7.63

TOP WARGAMES

NAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1 Steel Panthers	SSI	10.57
2 Panzer General	SSI	10.46
3 Rise of the West	RAW	9.63
4 Stalingrad	Avalon Hill	9.38
5 Operation Crusader	Avalon Hill	9.36
6 Flight Commander 2	Avalon Hill	9.35
7 Custer's Last Command	Incredible Simulations	9.12
8 Tanks	SSI	9.00
9 Tigers on the Prowl	HPS Simulations	8.97
10 Perfect General II	QOP	8.96

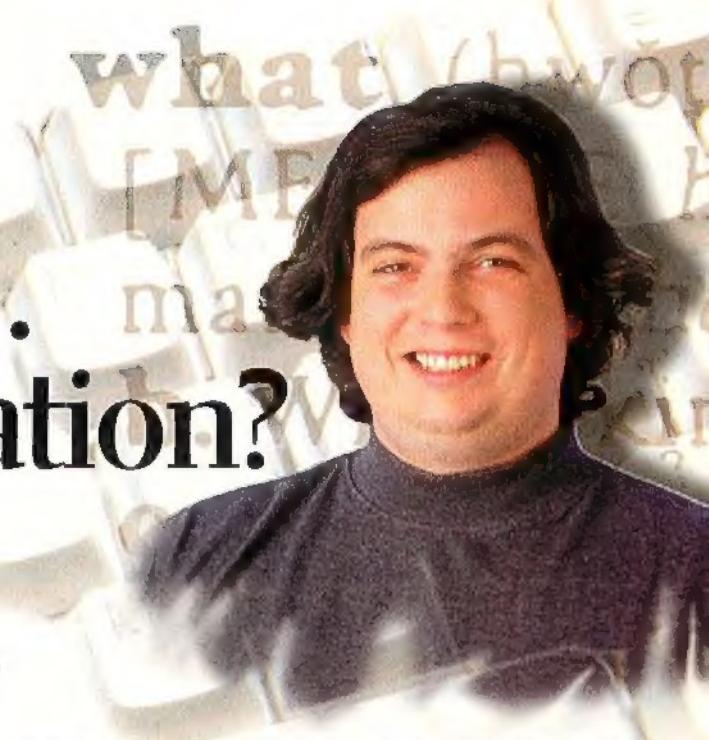
Reader Poll #137

GAME	COMPANY	TYPE	SCORE
★ 1 Steel Panthers	SSI	WG	10.57
★ Wing Commander 3	Origin	SI	10.57
3 Panzer General	SSI	WG	10.46
★ 4 X-COM	MicroProse	ST	10.37
★ 5 Crusader: No Remorse	Origin	AC	10.26
TIE Fighter	LucasArts	SI	10.26
7 DOOM	id Software	AC	10.24
8 MechWarrior 2	Activision	SI	10.06
9 NASCAR Racing	Papyrus	SI	10.01
10 Command & Conquer	Virgin	ST	9.97
★ 11 NBA Live '95	Electronic Arts	SP	9.88
12 Jagged Alliance	Sir-Tech	ST	9.81
13 U.S. Marine Fighters	Electronic Arts	SI	9.80
14 DOOM II	id Software	AC	9.77
15 Heroes of Might & Magic	New World Computing	ST	9.72
16 Dark Forces	LucasArts	AC	9.70
17 Master of Magic	MicroProse	ST	9.66
18 Front Page Sports Football 95	Sierra	SP	9.64
Warcraft	Blizzard	ST	9.64
20 Rise of the West	RAW	WG	9.63
21 U.S. Navy Fighters	Electronic Arts	SI	9.60
22 Wings of Glory	Origin	SI	9.56
23 Virtual Pool	Interplay	AC	9.52
24 Flight Unlimited	Looking Glass	SI	9.51
25 Magic Carpet	Electronic Arts	AC	9.48
★ 26 Full Throttle	LucasArts	AD	9.44
27 Indy Car Racing	Papyrus	SI	9.43
28 Gabriel Knight	Sierra	AD	9.42
29 Stalingrad	Avalon Hill	WG	9.38
X-COM: Terror from the Deep	MicroProse	ST	9.38
Aces of the Deep	Dynamix	SI	9.38
32 Operation Crusader	Avalon Hill	WG	9.38
33 Flight Commander 2	Avalon Hill	WG	9.35
34 Sam & Max Hit The Road	LucasArts	AD	9.33
35 Woodruff & Schnibble	Sierra	AD	9.28
36 Fleet Defender	MicroProse	SI	9.25
37 System Shock	Origin	AC	9.18
38 The Need For Speed	Electronic Arts	AC	9.16
39 Custer's Last Command	Incredible Simulations	WG	9.12
Relentless	Electronic Arts	AD	9.12
41 Ecstatica	Psynopsis	AD	9.09
42 Merchant Prince	QQP	ST	9.08
Heretic	id Software	AC	9.08
★ 44 Might & Magic: Clouds of Xeen	New World Computing	RP	9.07
Phantasmagoria	Sierra	AD	9.07
46 Under A Killing Moon	Access	AD	9.04
47 Tanks	SSI	WG	9.00
VGA Planets	Tim Wissaman	ST	9.00
49 Ravenloft: Stone Prophet	SSI	RP	8.98
50 Tigers on the Prowl	HPS Simulations	WG	8.97

GAME	COMPANY	TYPE	SCORE
★ 51 The Grandest Fleet	QQP	ST	8.96
Perfect General II	DDP	WG	8.96
★ 53 Legend of Kyrandia 3	Virgin	AD	8.94
Transport Tycoon	MicroProse	ST	8.94
55 PGA Tour Golf 486	Electronic Arts	SP	8.93
56 Descent	Interplay	AC	8.86
★ 58 Incredible Toons	Dynamix	CP	8.86
Incredible Machine 2	Sierra	CP	8.85
59 Hornet	Spectrum HoloByte	SI	8.84
60 Arena: The Elder Scrolls	Bethesda	RP	8.83
61 Carriers at War II	SSG	WG	8.82
62 Surf City	SSI	ST	8.80
63 Harpoon II	Three-Sixty Pacific	WG	8.78
64 Front Page Sports Baseball	Dynamix	SP	8.76
65 Star Trek: TNG, Final Unity	Spectrum HoloByte	AD	8.75
66 Genghis Khan II	Koei	WG	8.74
67 1830	Avalon Hill	ST	8.72
68 Hardball IV	Accolade	SP	8.70
69 Wolf	Sanctuary Woods	RP	8.64
King's Quest VII	Sierra	AD	8.64
71 Buried In Time	Sanctuary Woods	AD	8.63
72 Superheros of Hoboken	Legend	AD	8.62
73 1942 Pacific Air War Gold	MicroProse	SI	8.61
74 Magic Carpet 2	EA	AC	8.58
75 Panthers In the Shadows	HPS	WG	8.56
76 Werewolf vs. Comanche	NovaLogic	SI	8.55
FX Fighter	GTE Entertainment	AC	8.55
78 The Horde	Crystal Dynamics	AC, ST	8.50
Death Gate	Legend	AD	8.50
80 Star Trek: Judgment Rites	Interplay	AD	8.49
81 1942 Pacific Air War	MicroProse	SI	8.45
Apache	Interactive Magic	SI	8.45
Sid n' Al's Incredible Toons	Dynamix	ST	8.45
84 Dark Legions	SSI	AC	8.43
Lords of the Realm	Impressions	ST	8.42
86 Sim City CD-ROM	Interplay	ST	8.40
87 Cyclemania	Accolade	AC	8.37
88 Rebel Assault	LucasArts	AC	8.35
Hand Of Fate	Westwood Studios	AD	8.35
90 Loderunner	Dynamix	ST	8.31
91 Romance - Three Kingdoms III	Koei	ST	8.29
92 Celtic Tales	Koei	ST	8.28
93 Alone in the Dark II	I-Motion	AD	8.27
Bioforge	Origin	AD	8.27
95 Menzoberranzan	SSI	RP	8.26
Space Quest 6	Sierra	AD	8.26
97 Flight Sim Toolkit	Domark	SI	8.25
Clockwerx	Spectrum HoloByte	CP	8.25
99 Great Naval Battles 3	SSI	WG	8.20
100 Mortal Kombat II	Acclaim	AC	8.19

Games on unnumbered lines have scores equal to the line above. ★ = Top game of type. Red = New Game, AD = Adventure, RP = Role Playing, SI = Simulation/ Space Combat, ST = Strategy, WG = Wargame, AC = Action, SP = Sports, CP = Classic/Puzzle. Games are retired after two years and become eligible for the Hall of Fame.

What's the Deal with... Documentation?



If you don't count the inane titles cloned from cartridge machines, computer gaming is usually a complex experience. The player is experiencing a simulation of some kind. From building a rail empire to flying high-performance jets to running a theme park, most games are trying to give you the feel of a job you probably wouldn't get a crack at in real life—and that's where the fun really is. CPA by day...dashing Air Warrior by night.

Of course, when you paid 50-odd bucks to be thrown into somebody else's life in the old days, you got some background and a little instruction proportional to the task ahead. If you were trying to be a space-cowboy invading planets, you got a decent manual that covered the rules, explained the game controls and showed you what everything cost. If you were expected to drive some intricate simulation of a real-world machine or take control of massive armies, then there usually was something more—a hefty tome in there with your floppies, a book that would make you a master of the game, if you were willing to do the reading. I even admit to having done some of my game-purchasing by the pound: the heavier the box, the happier I was.

Unfortunately, except for brutally complex flight sims, one would be hard pressed to shop that way in today's wonderful multimedia world, where some smart suit has figured out if you cut everything that goes into the box with the game to a bare minimum, you can pay for more terrible acting for your live video sequences. While I'll agree that many adventure games and the like require minimum instruction—"Grab like this, talk like this"—it seems a shame that additional materials like the classic fake newspaper or desperate diary filled with clues seem to be going the way of the dodo. I'm sure touches like these cost a bit more, and they don't catch the media's eye like a real-life starlet with breasts twice the size nature originally gave her, but they are invaluable in creating the sense of mood that distinguishes a great game from a slow-loading B-Movie.

Even worse, now games without the dubious advantages of multimedia seem to be discovering the dollar value of the evil duo of '90s gaming: Minimal Doc and the \$20-Strat Guide.

"Now, I have nothing against the strategy guides per se, but what is getting to me is the fact that most guides these days are less about strategy and more about filling in the facts that should have been in

the game doc in the first place. At least half the pages of the typical strategy book are taken up by details about game aspects and "equipment" that players shouldn't

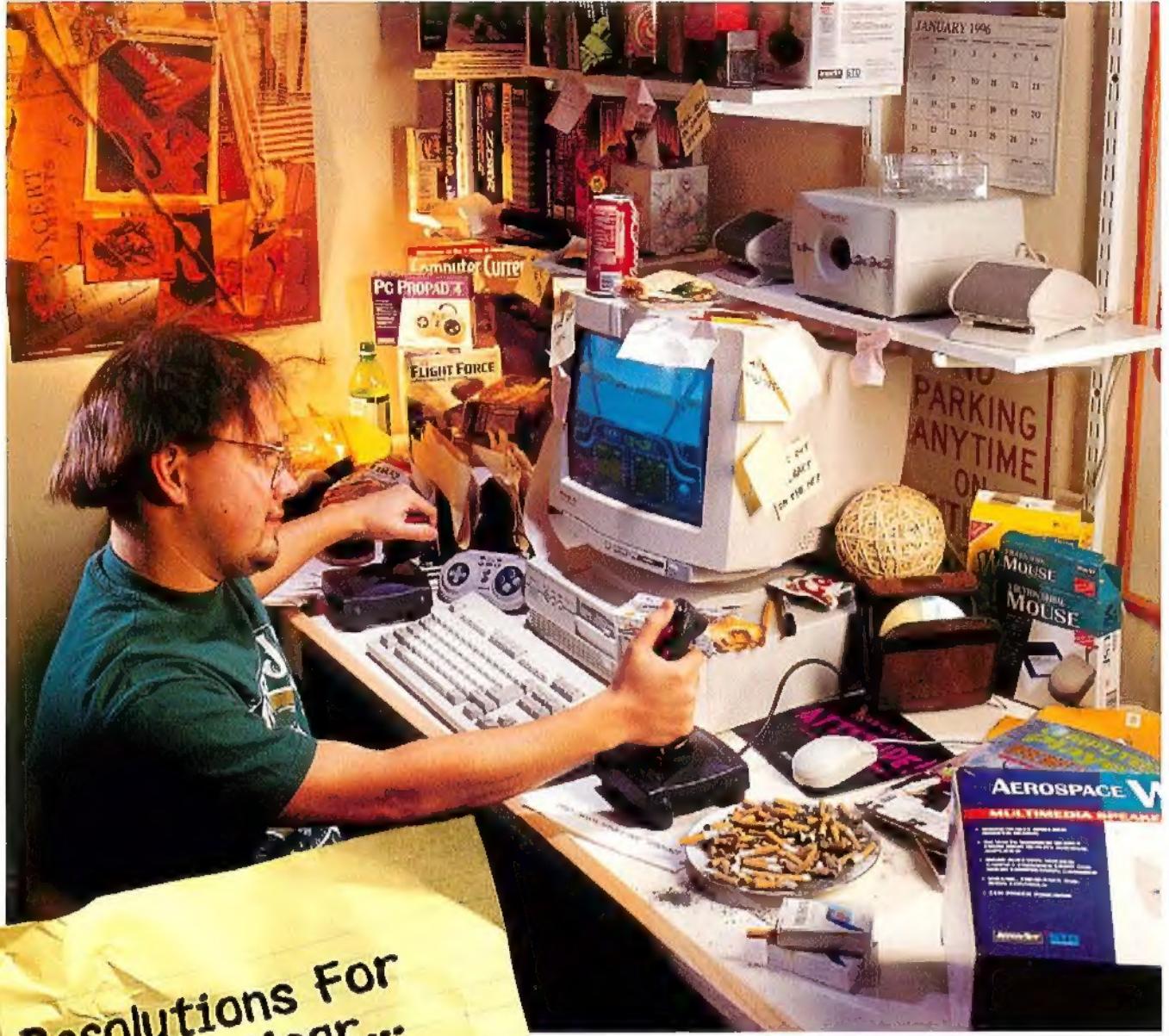
► “The evil duo of '90s games is a minimal doc and the \$20 strat guide.”

have to pay extra to find out about. For some reason, game companies have decided that since you can fit a few instructions on a slip of paper inside the case of a CD, a player doesn't deserve more. Yeah, maybe—if software was \$10 a pop.

Recent strategy and wargames seem to be very cynical in this tactic. ASCENDANCY assumes that nobody will mind shelling out extra money for a guide to tell you exactly

what the horde of gadgets that you discover actually do, in game terms; the game's documentation offers nothing but vague descriptions. I opened up *STEEL PANTHERS* expecting to find another classic Grigsby tome filled with history and countless tables, and instead I found 50-odd pages that looked like they had been run off and stapled by the kid in the SSI facilities department. As far as I am concerned, the little books you find in the Microprose/Sim-tex games or the one that came with *MECHWARRIOR2* should be considered the minimum for any kind of complex game. One of the nicest things about CivNET was just opening the box, and finding a CD game with a good, hefty rulebook.

Just to go over it one more time for you marketing guys out there: documentation is about telling the player everything they need to get the most out of their game. Strategy Guides are for giving players every advantage they can get to "beat" a game. While the latter is fun, we paid for the former the moment we slid our hard-earned bucks across the counter at the store. 



Resolutions For The New Year...

1. Go on a diet.
2. Stop smoking.
3. Organize my office.
4. Connect all of the
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for Christmas to
my system.

It's 1996. There's so much you want to accomplish this year—like beating all of those new games you got as gifts. And Interact's latest line of accessories can help you do it! Interact is your one-stop source for high-end game enhancing accessories! We've got a wide selection of controllers and top-of-the-line flight sticks that give you total and dominating control over all your new games and flight sims! We've got speakers and woofers that put you in the game with awesome stereo sound! Nice! Game cards! CD Wallets! Interact's got everything you need to push your gaming experience over the edge! So what's an extra couple of pounds? Quit smoking? Hey, you've got two lungs! Organization is for the weak! Get your priorities straight! Hook up your Interact accessories and get in the game!

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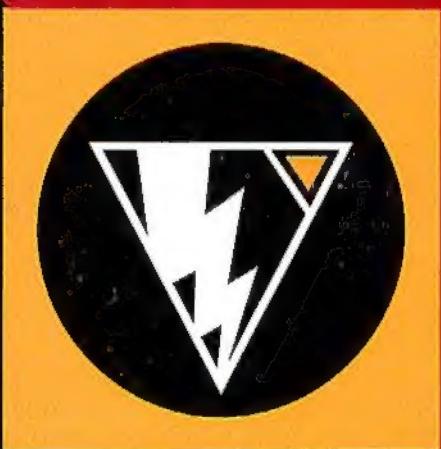
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